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THE GOLDEN YEARS

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THE GOLDEN YEARS

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PHILIP GIBBS



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GOVT GIRLS COLLEGE

The Golden Years

I

It seems incredible that I should know a lady who once danced with the Emperor Napoleon—the Third, of course—and had her hand kissed by old “Dizzy” with his oiled ringlets, and her cheek—smooth and rose-flushed in those days—touched by a young man who was hanged publicly outside Newgate Prison.

And if one reckons age by the mind instead of the body, she is not old yet. She is young enough to take a keen interest in modern ideas and the political situation, reading the novels of Aldous Huxley, for example—with great disapproval—and abusing Mr. Baldwin for his policy of “Safety First”, which she considers too unadventurous for a people of spirit. The other day when I went to tea with her in a little country house I reckoned up her age. She was eighteen, she told me, when Mr. Gladstone became Prime Minister for the first time. Well, that was in the year 1868, and, according to my arithmetic, which is never very good, that makes her eighty-one in the year 1931, when these words are written.

Eighty-one and still alert, quick-witted and amusing, so that without any frightful wrench of imagination—though it needed an effort—I could see her in my mind’s eye in her hooped frock of white muslin with little blue bows below her sloping shoulders, as when she dropped her curtsy to Queen Victoria and felt her heart beat against her stays.

Eighty-one years since she was born ; sixty-three, then, since she took a four-wheeled cab to Madame Tussaud’s to meet a lover waiting for her among the waxworks, looking constantly at a watch which he pulled out of a flowered waistcoat cut high above his peg-top trousers. Yet in the memory of this lady, still living, still alert to life, the world has changed beyond all recognition. That London in which she went about as a

young beauty was nothing like the London of to-day. Many of its old houses still stand with their stuccoed fronts—the long dreariness of Cromwell Road, the quiet dignity of Eaton Square, the innumerable streets of hideous uniformity built when the industrial era spoilt the beauty of England and created the wealth of the middle classes—but the life that went on in them has gone into the ghost world.

The flunkeys have gone with their powdered wigs and silk stockings, as when they bowed to Isobel Ingleby when she went up the grand staircase of Dorchester House, which is now a block of flats, or Sutherland House, which is now a museum. The German governesses have gone from little top bedrooms in Belgrave Square where they kept photographs of German students in smoking-caps and from which they descended to the lower floor to torture pigtailed young ladies with the construction of German grammar. Business firms have invaded the inner sanctuaries of the nobility and gentry, so that there are brass plates on the doors of Grosvenor Gardens and Berkeley Square. The old families are sadly reduced in estate by the ruthlessness of democratic governments who have to provide the costs of a great war and to pay for an increasing scale of social services. Their pomp and their power have departed. Their titles give them no greater privilege than paying more for their household bills. Some of them—the granddaughters of Isobel Ingleby's girl friends—keep small shops of their own in Beauchamp Place, or serve behind the counters of Peter Jones, and go home after working hours to little houses newly painted and fitted with brass knockers and window-boxes, in streets where sixty years ago—even twenty years ago—there was a slum population in these very same houses, drunken, brutal, and unwashed!

Smart servant girls, neatly dressed, with silk stockings under their short frocks, come up from the basements of semi-detached houses in neighbourhoods where, in the girlhood of this lady now still living, life below stairs was a slavery to the slatterns who washed the dishes for middle-class families. They slept in dark little rooms, beetle-haunted and airless, from which they crept out at dawn to let in black devils armed with black brooms who cuffed the ears of small urchins of eight or ten years old whimpering before they crawled up the sooty chimneys—until "Mr. Punch" and the Earl of Shaftesbury forced the chimney-sweeps charter upon a reluctant House of Lords.

Coaches still ran from Charing Cross when Isobel Ingleby was a young thing with her hair in a "chignon" under a pork-pie hat. Once, greatly daring, and unbeknown to her noble father, she took one of the three-horsed omnibuses from Victoria station and sat with her feet in the straw provided on wet days. The hansom cab was the fastest moving vehicle on hire, but not respectable for single ladies. The old "growler" set the pace of the London traffic, impeded by farm carts crawling up to Covent Garden. The nobility and gentry—how absurd those words sound to us now!—kept carriages and pairs in mews which are now garages for motor-cars. Gone are the ostlers who used to rub down sleek cobs and well-fed hacks with a cheerful noise of hissing interrupted by dreadful oaths. Gone also are the frowsy women who screamed down to them from the rooms above, where they added annually to the monster growth of London's population.

The old lady with whom I took tea last week and who discussed with me the manners and morals of the younger crowd of to-day—she approves of them—remembers the society of London as it was pictured by Dicky Doyle and afterwards by George Du Maurier, with its lovely and haughty hostesses, its new rich, its flunkeydom, and even further back than that, when Lord Palmerston—"old Pam"—ruled England with a genial brutality which made foreign statesmen tremble in their shoes if the Lion roared never so gently. Last year she crossed to France in an aeroplane. . . .

How is it possible that any mind can have adapted itself to so much change, to such a speeding up in the rhythm of life, to such differences of manners and customs and mentality? I look at her and marvel. Because her world in girlhood was as different from ours as though she had come from another planet, not so much in its outward aspects but in the workings of the mind itself.

We forget the days of our grandfathers. Democracy has won its victories, and some of those who were its most ardent advocates have begun to lose faith in it. The counting of heads—how foolish! The bribery of the electorate by doles and social service—how scandalous! The tyranny of the Trade Unions—how abominable! Yes, the pendulum has swung far since democracy began to get out of its squalor and servitude, and when there were wild beasts in London and slaves—in the sweated industries—in the jungle of its slums.

We look back and laugh at the Victorian idealists. Watts,

Ruskin, William Morris, Burne-Jones—how sentimental, romantic, and unreal! They seem to the younger minds among us stuffed with as much false idealism as their sofas were with horsehair.

The Liberalism of the nineteenth century, with its simple faith in the perfectibility of human nature and the inevitable progress of humanity towards the kingdom of heaven on earth, by way of free education, free trade, and the blessing of the ballot box, is almost delightful in its absurdity to the modern intellectual who went through a world war and has seen its sequence in Fascism and Communism. There is a movement towards dictatorship. Liberty is a word which has lost its magic since it knocked at the doors of English homes in Eaton Square and the stuccoed houses—highly genteel—built by Mr. Cubitt.

We are strangely close to a past when England was still feudal, and when the moral tone of the Victorian Court lay rather heavily over the social life of the nation. Yet how remote it seems—the kind of life which was lived by our own grandfathers and grandmothers, some of them still living, like this old lady whose eyes are still bright enough to glint with humour when she tells me of her early days, her love affairs, her great adventure—and whose heart is still warm enough to love the young people of to-day! Yesterday when I said good-bye and kissed her hand—a little, wrinkled, clawlike hand—she said, "Write what you like about me. People won't believe it, anyhow! But don't strip me in the market-place. I can still blush when I think of my naughtiness."

She blushed then, after sixty-three years since she went to meet a lover in Madame Tussaud's.

II

ALDERTON HOUSE, in the county of Surrey, not far from the Portsmouth Road where on high days and holidays there is an endless stream of motor traffic, is now a girls' school conducted by a community of nuns. Part of its old park has been given over to a building estate, which has put up rows of small houses—not too bad—each with a garage and a strip of garden. The house, hardly changed except for bathrooms alongside the girls' dormitories, dates from the early Georgian era—the ballroom was in the Adam style with a frieze of Wedgwood figures—but there are no ghosts about. I have not heard that the Reverend Mother has ever encountered the figure of Isobel's grandfather, the sixth Earl of Alderton, who was a boon companion of the Prince Regent and poor Beau Brummel, and a reckless gambler at White's Club, until he drank himself to death to the great relief of his wife—a daughter of the Marquis of Edgeworth—who had suffered his brutalities for twenty years. Nor do the holy nuns ever get visited, it seems, by the shades of Isobel's father and his friends who used to sit late at dinner in the room overlooking the lawns—it is now a class-room—discussing the political situation, the Indian Mutiny, the Crimean War, the decay of agriculture, the Fenian atrocities in Ireland, and the menace to the Crown from an advancing radicalism.

Those, at least, were the topics discussed in serious moods by Lord Alderton and his political friends. They had their lighter moments—generally when the ladies had left the table, and when the port was passing. Gusts of laughter from hearty gentlemen with bushy side-whiskers, and voluminous stocks about their dog's-eared collars, came through the closed doors even to the ears of a little girl whose nursery happened to be on the other side of the courtyard one floor higher.

"Why doesn't Papa tell *us* some of his funny stories?" she asked one night when her mother came to kiss her as usual after dinner.

Alison, Lady Alderton—her portrait by Millais hangs in the

National Gallery—smiled down at this inquisitive child who at ten years of age had a habit of asking the most embarrassing questions.

"Gentlemen's stories are not meant for little girls, my darling."

"Why not, Mamma? Some little girls have a great sense of humour. I don't see why Papa should shut us out when he gets funny and only let us see him when he's bad-tempered."

"Hush, my dear child!" cried Lady Alderton, extremely shocked. "That is disrespectful. Say your prayers and ask God to make you a good little girl."

Isobel asked God to make her a good little girl—perhaps she didn't pray quite earnestly enough—and wondered why her beautiful mother was so frightened of Papa, that tall, handsome man with curly brown whiskers whom all the servants called his lordship. They were all frightened of him, she noticed. Miss Venables, who came to her as a governess about this time, went all of a dither if he passed her on the stairs or came into the nursery—generally with muddy boots and brown gaiters—for a word with Isobel on rare occasions.

"Well, young woman, I hope you're behaving yourself?"

"Yes, Papa."

"That's all right. How do you like the pony?"

"Very much, Papa. I can ride it all by myself now!"

She was only a little bit frightened of him. But Miss Venables was terrified. After such a visit she would put her hand to her heart as though her stays were bursting. She breathed jerkily. Her face—not very beautiful—had gone a greenish white. But she always tried to hide her fright by talking about Isobel's Papa as though he were a kind of God.

"I'm sure it's very kind of his lordship to come and see you in the nursery. How grateful you ought to be, darling, for having such a noble father! I do hope you will grow up to be worthy of him and to reverence all the good he is doing to our dear country. When I read his speeches in *The Times* I think how wonderful it is that I should be under the same roof as a nobleman who is one of the most trusted advisers of our gracious Queen. Last night he spoke in the House of Lords in defence of the Established Church in Ireland. Most beautiful! Would you like me to read it to you?"

"No thank you, Miss Venables. Will you kindly go on with the *Pickwick Papers*. I'm sure they are much more amusing than one of Papa's speeches".

Even her brother Richard, who had just gone up to Eton and was very brave with horses and dogs and could climb the highest tree without being afraid, became tongue-tied and timid in the presence of his father, whom he avoided on all possible occasions.

Once Isobel questioned him about it.

"Why do you always slink away when Papa appears, Richard?"

"I don't slink away," said Richard. "I just find it more amusing elsewhere."

"I believe you're afraid of him like everybody else—except me!"

"Rot! I'm afraid of nobody."

"Not even when you get flogged at Eton?"

"Pooh, that's nothing! My hide is as tough as leather."

"Well, anyhow, you're afraid of Papa. I can see it in your eyes. You stutter when he speaks to you. Cowardly, I call it."

"Oh, you do, do you? Well, take that, you little ——"

He called her a dreadful stable word which once she had used to Miss Venables when that poor old dear (she always thought of her as "poor old dear", though she was only twenty-eight) lost her temper one day and dared to rap the daughter of the Earl of Alderton across the knuckles for not knowing that William the Conqueror was 1066. Richard also pinched her arm until she squealed and retaliated by jabbing a needle—she was sewing a sampler at the time—into his right shoulder.

"You're a damned little vixen!" cried Richard.

For once he was furious with a sister two years younger than himself, whom as a rule he treated with lordly good nature.

But it was quite true that he was afraid of his father and always began to stutter slightly when addressed directly by the author of his being. It was not that Isobel's Papa was particularly stern or grim—later in life she was astonished to find that he was a shy man—but the respect due to him as "his lordship" and the reverence demanded from children to their parents in that state of life invested him with an awfulness which only Isobel questioned, and later challenged.

Every morning at eight o'clock a bell was rung in the hall and the chief servants and the chief members of the household—Mrs. Twining, the housekeeper; Mr. Brandon, the steward; Mr. Birch, the head footman; Mr. Thorpe, Richard's tutor before he went to Eton; Miss Venables; and several maids—assembled

in his lordship's study for morning prayers. It was a large room, with its walls clothed in books, which gave it a musty smell, mingling with a faint aroma of snuff and old port. Isobel's Papa sat at a big desk, above which was a portrait engraving of the Queen in her bridal robes by Winterhalter, signed by her Majesty herself in that fine pointed script with the long loop to the V which was so familiar to Isobel Ingleby a few years later. Always before reading the prayers of the day her Papa trumpeted into his handkerchief of flowered silk. Always Mrs. Twining's stays creaked when she flopped to her knees. Always Mr. Brandon, the steward, drew a hassock very stealthily towards him before he knelt on bony joints. Mr. Thorpe, a shy young man with dreamy eyes, who taught Isobel the elements of Greek and Latin, sighed heavily before kneeling on the Turkey carpet, either because of melancholy reflections about the sadness of life or because of the inevitable damage to trousers strapped beneath the boot.

Miss Venables sometimes suffered from an affliction which Richard with schoolboy vulgarity called the "collywobbles". It was probably due to tight lacing imposed on her by the fashions of the time, and at morning prayers it had a disturbing effect upon the gravity of Isobel Ingleby, who, even in her nursery days, had developed, she tells me, a most troublesome sense of humour. More than once she was sent out of the room for giggling, after a stern reprimand from her father, and once retired voluntarily because of an irresistible desire to laugh at the little warblings, chirrupings, and crescendo scales coming from the internal mechanism of poor Miss Venables.

Yet it was not irreverence. It was impossible to be irreverent deliberately when Papa read out the prayers in a rich grave voice which dropped to a deep note when he implored the blessing of Almighty God upon the work of the day. There was silence for half a minute until he cleared his throat, gave the signal to rise, and addressed some very ordinary remark to one of the household.

"Oh, Brandon, I notice that one of the gates has been taken off its hinges up beyond the long copse. Some blackguard boys, I suppose. See about it, won't you?"

"Yes, my lord, I noticed it yesterday. Poachers, I expect. There's a gipsy camp on the common, my lord."

The maids crept away to their duties. Mrs. Twining smoothed her dress and dropped a slight curtsy before she departed to her own room where she had breakfast with the butler and the

head footman. Miss Venables and Mr. Thorpe had breakfast with the Family.

On Sundays the Family went to church in some state, preceded up the nave by a footman carrying the prayer books, while all the congregation stood until they had entered the big pew which concealed them from the vulgar gaze. Some of the old men still wore smocks. The old women in shawls and many petticoats curtsied when the family left the church again. The local gentry gathered round the porch, and there was much doffing of tall hats, much rustling of silken gowns billowing over their hoops, and the air was drenched with scent, which the ladies of that time used freely to destroy the country smells and the unpleasant odour of human bodies in a rural congregation who had no great facilities for cleanliness in their thatched cottages.

Isobel Ingleby remembers the kind of remarks passed in the church porch.

"What does your lordship think of Mr. Disraeli's speech last night?"

"The weather has turned slightly inclement, has it not, Lady Alderton? I hope it will not spoil Mrs. Lavington's garden-party to-morrow. I hear there is to be a great croquet match between the gentlemen and ladies. So distressing if it rains!"

"A very thoughtful sermon by the dear vicar! Did you not think so, Lady Alderton? If only our local Radicals could hear such wise and noble words! Such a warning against the evils of our time!"

The gentlemen swept off their hats to Isobel's Mamma, who smiled upon them graciously and accepted their homage with a charming dignity. She walked with a grace unknown to the modern girl, having learnt deportment in Mr. D'Egville's academy. Her gown flowed about her. Her little bonnet, trimmed with forget-me-nots, revealed her looped hair, and even the Paisley shawl which had been brought into fashion by Her Majesty could not quite conceal her lovely figure.

General Colville, who had fought in the Crimean War, took the liberty of kissing her hand one day.

"My dear Alison, you grow more beautiful every day! By Gad, my dear, I can hardly believe it's fifteen years since I came to your wedding. Now I'm a gouty old man with one foot in the grave."

"And I am an elderly matron with two grown-up children!" said Isobel's Mamma.

"No, no; elderly be hanged! In the full bloom of beauty,

my dear ! A June rose. If I were a younger man I should find you very dangerous. By Jove I should !”

“Hush, General ! And outside a church too ! Supposing the people heard you saying such shocking things ?”

The only person who heard was Isobel, who was very much amused. It was absurd to think that her Mamma could be “dangerous”. She was terribly old. At least thirty-three. And old General Colville must be getting on for a hundred. It was a pity, she thought, that there were no young men in the neighbourhood who came to church on Sunday. Now that she was reading poetry so much—the *Idylls of the King*—she was beginning to think about romantic love. It must be very nice, she thought, to be loved by a young and extremely good-looking young man, who would be, of course, of noble family and as brave as one of Arthur’s Knights, *sans peur et sans reproche*. She had spoken about it once or twice to Miss Venables, but her governess was shocked.

“You are much too young to think about such things, my dear !” said Miss Venables.

“Have you ever been loved by a young man, Venny ?” asked Isobel.

Miss Venables blushed very deeply and confessed that she had once been admired by the curate of a church at Clapham who had been removed a year later to a country parish.

“What is love ?” asked Isobel. “It seems to be very unreasonable sometimes. It makes people do the most ridiculous things. They like to die in each other’s arms, or one’s lover goes about killing men who dare to admire one’s beauty, if one happens to be beautiful. Passion stirs one. One is thrilled by an ecstasy of desire for a young man who is probably rather a nincompoop really. He avoids his food, and climbs up to one’s bedroom window——”

Miss Venables cried out in horrified distress.

“My dear young lady, I really must *beseech* you not to talk like that. I cannot think how such ideas get into your head.”

“But, my dear Venny,” said Isobel, “why do you get so shocked when I try to get a little information about love ? Surely it is a very Christian kind of thing. Haven’t I got a text over my bed saying, ‘God is love’ ? Isn’t it necessary and natural for people to love one another ? Didn’t Papa fall in love with Mamma, though really it does seem rather impossible that Mamma should have fallen in love with Papa. I mean, I cannot

imagine Papa being thrilled by passion or becoming ardent and amorous."

Miss Venables looked unutterably distressed, and changed the subject in the most abrupt way.

"If you please, my dear, we will have a little lesson with the globes."

III

It was on the afternoon of a garden-party at Alderton House that Isobel had an adventure which she decided to keep secret from Miss Venables and others.

She was twelve years old and dressed in her very best clothes, with her pigtail tied up in a silk bow, and a rose-coloured frock which stuck out on each side and showed the lace on her drawers, and white socks with low-heeled shoes. Richard was equally magnificent and uncomfortable in his first Eton suit with a pot hat which rested on his ears.

At first it was quite amusing to walk round the lawns looking at all the gentlemen and ladies who had driven over in broughams and phaetons and dogcarts from the surrounding neighbourhood. The hooped dresses of the ladies swept the lawns, on which no single daisy was allowed to show its head. Their little parasols were of all the colours of the rainbow. The gentlemen—mostly very old gentlemen in the opinion of the romantic Isobel, who was looking for Sir Galahad—wore fawn-coloured coats and grey top hats, and white waistcoats from which hung bunches of seals and heavy gold chains. Their whiskers were luxuriant and noble, though none of them looked quite so glorious as the two tall footmen—Charles and Robert—who wore their full livery under powdered wigs and paced the lawns with silver trays and rose-tinted ices. Many of the ladies greeted Isobel with little cries of tenderness and admiration.

"How you have grown, my dear! What a *sweet* frock you are wearing! How *much* you resemble your darling Mamma!"

Several gentlemen bent down to pat her hand or smile at her through monocles tied to their buttonholes with black ribbon.

"'Pon my soul, you will be exactly like your lady mother one of these days," said one of them. "Lucky young woman. Don't be too cruel with those bright eyes of yours!"

"I shall never be as beautiful as Mamma," said Isobel.

The gentleman swung the seal from his fob pocket and smiled down at her.

"Well, my dear, perhaps it's hardly possible! Your mother is one of the great beauties of England. I was desperately in love with her before your father had the luck to capture her."

"How strange!" said Isobel. "If you had married Mamma you would have been my Papa. I think perhaps it might have been more amusing."

The gentleman had a good-looking face with friendly and humorous eyes, which lighted up with laughter.

"My dear little girl! You embarrass me!"

He laughed very heartily, leaning upon a silver-knobbed stick, and then straightened himself and took off his grey topper when Lady Alderton, who had crossed the lawn, put her hand on his arm and spoke to him with mock severity.

"What wicked things are you saying to my little girl, Lord Malmesbury?"

"Nothing scandalous, my dear lady! I give you my word of honour. On the contrary, your charming little daughter paid me a pretty compliment."

There was a movement among the guests by the striped marquee beyond the verandah.

"Oh, excuse me," said Lady Alderton. "I must go and make myself polite to a very important guest. Come with me, Isobel."

Isobel noticed that everybody seemed to become excited by the arrival of a strange-looking man who advanced slowly across the lawn, bowing very deeply to right and left, while he carried his hat in his hand with a pair of lavender-coloured gloves, so that the sun shone on his dark hair plastered in ringlets above his forehead. He had a long lean face with a hook nose, and his skin was like old ivory, and his eyes, very dark and luminous, were heavily puffed under their lids. He smiled and smiled, with his thin lips creased like a comic mask.

"Oh, Mr. Disraeli, how *kind* of you to come!" cried Isobel's Mamma, holding out her hand and sinking a little towards him in her billowing gown.

Mr. Disraeli took her hand and bent low over it.

"I would come much farther, dear lady, for the privilege of seeing your exquisite beauty."

Lady Alderton blushed and laughed.

"You are always a flatterer of women, Mr. Disraeli."

The statesman's thin lips softened into a more tender smile.

"No, dear Lady Alderton, it is only to pretty women that I tell the truth. I keep my flattery for political friends, though I

trust you not to betray that secret. Who is this pretty little girl like an English rosebud?"

He pretended not to believe that it was Lady Alderton's daughter.

"Impossible! Surely your younger sister?"

He took Isobel's hand and raised it to his lips. "How adorable is childhood!" he murmured. "How old and wicked it makes me feel!"

"My dear Disraeli!" said Isobel's Papa. "It's exceedingly good of you to come all this way—and after that wonderful speech of yours in the House yesterday. Gladstone turned green while he listened to you. He couldn't keep still on the Front Bench."

"Mr. Gladstone never keeps still," said Mr. Disraeli. "He is a volcano of restless energy. I envy him his moral fire. So sure of his own righteousness! So certain of his principles!"

"A hypocrite of the deepest dye," said Lord Alderton scornfully.

"No, no. Utterly sincere, I assure you. He has the strength of fanaticism. But I see dear Lady Jerningham, who is always very kind to me."

He moved towards one of the lovely ladies, and it was shortly afterwards that Isobel Ingleby decided that she was tired of all these grown-ups and that it would be more amusing to take a peep at three newborn tits which she had found in a nest in the long copse. Richard, as she found on enquiry from one of the footmen—her friend Robert—had retired into the house feeling sick after four ices and three glasses of claret cup.

She made her way through the rose garden, where some of the guests were wandering with little cries of ecstasy over the *Gloires de Dijon*. Then she slipped into the copse, where on summer days she liked to come with a book—Scott's *Ivanhoe* or *Quentin Durward*, or some tale of romance by G. P. R. James. It was nice to get away from Miss Venables sometimes, although she loved her very much. If she sat very quiet the bunny rabbits came out of their burrows and played quite close to her, or two baby squirrels chased each other up the very oak tree whose gnarled old roots made a good armchair for her. The light glinted through the young willows and alders with their spring leaves wonderfully green, like a picture by Mr. Millais. The woodpeckers laughed in the copse and little tits flitted about, hatched before those three new babies which she had found in the nest yesterday. She liked being alone here because she could imagine herself as a fairy

princess or as one of Shakespeare's ladies—Rosalind or Juliet—or as Elaine in the *Idylls of the King*.

The three baby tits were still in the nest. She peeped at them and said "Tweet, tweet!" Then she tore her frock by getting it caught in a bramble, and was distressed for a moment at the thought of the "wiggling" she would get from Miss Venables, and at that moment she saw two eyes looking at her through the leaves of an elderberry bush. They were brown eyes like those of a young deer, but they belonged to a human creature, because she could see a bit of a nose.

"Hullo!" she said.

For a moment there was no answer but only a slight movement in the undergrowth. Then a voice answered her, "Ullo!"

"Who are you?" asked Isobel. "You needn't be afraid."

Again there was no answer for a moment.

Then the undergrowth stirred again and someone broke his way through and stood before her.

It was a boy about sixteen. He had tousled hair falling over his forehead, and he wore a ragged shirt and a pair of trousers torn so much that one of his knees showed through with its bare skin. He was very brown and sunburnt.

He stood there staring at Isobel with a shy smile—shy as though ready to bolt at a moment's notice, and yet with a look of amusement as though Isobel looked funny to him.

"Who are you?" asked Isobel. "What are you doing in this copse?"

"What do you think I'm a-doing of?"

Isobel thought the matter out and then gave a guess.

"Bird's-nesting."

He grinned and gave a short laugh.

"Likely, ain't it?"

"Well, what, then?"

"Snaring rabbits, if you want to know."

Isobel raised her eyebrows and her eyes became like two round O's because of a shocked surprise.

"That's poaching! If the gamekeepers catch you they'll have you put in prison."

The boy grinned and shrugged his shoulders under the ragged shirt which showed his bare brown chest.

"They won't catch *me*. I'm a gipsy. Gamekeepers don't catch gipsies."

Isobel was rather excited by the thought that she was talking to a gipsy. She had just read a story about gipsies in the *Bow*

Bells Novelette which had been left in the night nursery by one of the maids. It was the story of a young gipsy who was really the son of a duke, having been stolen from his sorrowing parents and taken away in a caravan. It was quite likely that this ragged boy was the son of a duke.

"Do you live in a caravan?" she asked.

The boy nodded and jerked his thumb in the direction of the common.

"It must be great fun!" said Isobel.

The boy spat into the undergrowth, an action which would have horrified Miss Venables, who had sent Richard to bed when he was a smaller boy for seeing how far he could spit a cherry stone.

"Brats and fleas. Not enough to put in one's guts unless one gets a bit of luck in poaching."

Isobel blinked at the word "guts". It was one of the unmentionable words, she had been given to understand, though she had heard it used by the stable boys.

The boy was grinning at her again, and she noticed what white teeth he had.

"Why are you smiling?" she asked.

"I can't help laffing at you. You look like a wax doll for a fairing. I ain't never spoke to one of your sort. Didn't think you was real when I squinted at you through the leaves. Ain't you feard of messing that green petticoaty and them little shining shoes?"

"I can always change them when I get wet," said Isobel.

"Up at the big place?" asked the boy, looking towards Alderton House, invisible through the foliage.

Isobel nodded.

"My father is Lord Alderton. He speaks in the House of Lords sometimes."

The boy did not look impressed, but he seemed to understand.

"One of the Nobs! Them as drives us off the commons and passes laws agin us! I've seen 'em with their doxies at the races. My mither calls 'em 'the lucky gentlemen', and asks them to cross her palm with siller. . . . Got any pennies on you, Missy?"

"I'm afraid not," said Isobel. "I've left my purse up at the house."

"Nor yet a bit of bread, Missy?"

"Are you hungry?" she asked, shocked at this sudden thought.

"Nothing in my guts since yesterday."

Isobel blinked again at that dreadful word, but she felt sorry for this tall, brown-skinned boy with eyes like a young deer.

"Wait a minute! I'll fetch you something."

She made her way back through the copse to the lawns, which were crowded with the garden-party. Many more people had arrived, and the silk frocks of the ladies made big bouquets of colour on the grass and their little parasols twinkled as they shaded their faces from the warm sun. Isobel slipped between the groups towards the marquee where the refreshments were spread out.

The gentlemen were demanding claret cup and ices for the ladies and the maids, and footmen were looking hot and flustered. Isobel waited for a good opportunity and said, "Excuse me!" to a portly old gentleman who was wedged against the buffet. As he turned, she grabbed at a pile of sandwiches and secured half a dozen.

"Thank you so much!"

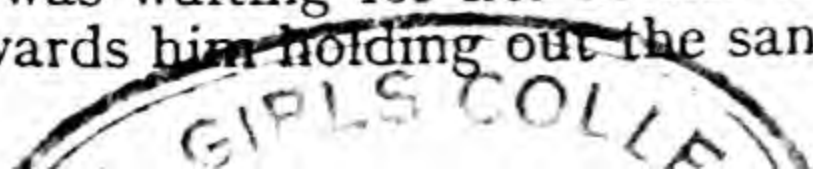
As she darted away she heard the remark of the fat old gentleman: "What a greedy little girl!"

She dodged Miss Venables by a hair's breadth as her governess stood talking to Mr. Thorpe on the edge of the front lawn. It would have been disastrous if Miss Venables had seen that pile of sandwiches, because she was a great stickler for propriety and had a real horror of the lower orders, for one of whom this provender was intended. Often when Isobel was younger than now Miss Venables had warned her against going near dirty little ragamuffins or speaking to any of the village children to whom she had waved her hand when passing them on the common. She was always instructed to gargle if she had gone close to them.

"The lower orders," said Miss Venables, "are extremely dirty, my dear. Of course they cannot help it, not having been brought up nicely, but you must always remember the station in life to which God has called you in His mercy and wisdom."

How shocked she would be if she knew that Isobel was carrying sandwiches to a gipsy boy, who had had nothing in his guts since yesterday! Isobel's eyes shone at the thought of this adventure. It was exactly like a fairy story. She was the beautiful princess carrying succour to a young knight disguised as a beggarman. . . . It was quite likely, anyhow, that this good-looking boy had been stolen from his mother's cradle and carried off by the gipsies.

He was waiting for her in the copse, and grinned when she ran towards him holding out the sandwiches.



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"I'm sorry I couldn't bring a plate," she said politely.

"Them's good," said the boy. He took a great bite out of one of the sandwiches and spoke again with his mouth full.

"Cripes. Them goes down fine!"

He ate like Richard's terrier, bolting the sandwiches so that they disappeared with remarkable speed.

"Is there anything else I can do for you?" asked Isobel, feeling that she had done something very gracious and princessified.

The boy wiped the crumbs from his mouth with the back of his brown hand.

"Give me a lucky keepsake," he asked. "You're a nice little lady. Not like other fine lady folk what send their dogs at us if we call for chairs to mend or brooms to sell."

Isobel hesitated. She had nothing very much she could give this boy as a keepsake. There was no pocket in her party frock. Then she had an idea. There was a little ring on her finger. It had been given to her by Miss Venables as a birthday present. It was a little gold ring with one pearl in it.

"Would you like that for a keepsake?" she asked.

She pulled it off her third finger and held it out to him.

For a moment he did not want to take it. Then he snatched it out of her hand and thrust it into the side pocket of his ragged trousers.

"I'll keep it for luck," he said.

Something stirred in the undergrowth. A twig snapped and a kingfisher fled from a bush.

The young gipsy put his head on one side and listened like a frightened animal.

"There's folks," he said. "Good-bye, little Missy!"

"What's your name?" she asked, as he was ready to run.

"Zachary Lee. A Romany, you know."

"My name is Isobel," she told him.

She held out her hand to him very graciously. For a second he looked at it with a sheepish grin. It was so white and clean compared with his own brown paw. Then he took it and bent down towards her and kissed her cheek in a brotherly way before darting off through the undergrowth.

Isobel stood very still where he had left her. She had not expected to be kissed like that. She was frightened and rather horrified. The Earl of Alderton's daughter to be kissed by a ragged gipsy boy! She would never dare to tell anyone of such a frightful thing. It was a degradation. It was disgusting . . .

unless by some chance he happened to be the son of a duke. She took out her handkerchief and rubbed her cheek very hard, and even put it to her lips and wetted it with her spittle and rubbed it harder than ever. Then she turned round quickly as one of the gamekeepers appeared.

He touched his cap and spoke respectfully.

"Good afternoon, my lady. I suppose you haven't seen anyone about?"

"Why?" asked Isobel.

"There's some fellow been laying snares for rabbits. One of the gipsies on the common, I wouldn't be surprised. Wait till I catch the rascal. His lordship knows how to deal with them poachers and all such vermin."

"I expect they're difficult to catch," said Isobel guardedly.

"Oh, as artful as monkeys," said the gamekeeper.

That night Isobel found a flea in her bed. At least Miss Venables was almost certain it was a flea.

"I cannot think how it could have got on to you, my poor dear!" she cried. "Oh, it makes me shudder at the thought!"

"Perhaps I caught it from Mr. Disraeli!" suggested Isobel.

She laughed under the bedclothes at the look of consternation on Miss Venables' darling face. But in the secret chamber of her soul she knew that the flea had come from a boy called Zachary Lee, and she was somewhat conscience-stricken at the dreadful way in which she had "demeaned" herself—that was a word much used by Miss Venables—with one of the lower orders. It was all the fault of her romantic imagination and a story she had read in the *Bow Bells Novelette* which one of the maids had left about.

IV

ALDERTON HOUSE, under the shelter of Leith Hill, was somewhat remote from neighbouring mansions at that time, although now a by-pass cuts across its former park, bringing an endless tide of cars on sunny holidays, and building estates have dotted houses in many fields where Isobel picked bluebells and cowslips, and where Miss Venables kept a sharp look-out for cows, which she regarded as wild and ferocious beasts. Five miles in a governess cart or a dog cart was a long journey in those days, though now one flashes by the same distance in a few minutes, and for this reason Isobel was sometimes a lonely little lady in her father's big park. There were not many children of her own age and social class in the immediate neighbourhood, but she remembers the vicar's children being invited to tea and behaving very primly in the presence of their elders, but pulling her pigtail and putting out their tongues at her and calling her a silly little dressed-up doll when their governesses retired to Miss Venables' private room believing that the dear children were behaving like little angels.

There were visits to aunts of almost incredible antiquity, who still wore the fashions of the Georgian era and who remembered the Battle of Waterloo as though it were yesterday. Aunt Louisa—the dowager Countess of Shere—had danced at the Duchess of Richmond's ball in Brussels, and she fluttered the same fan which she had used to stir the hearts of the young officers in the Fifty-first Foot and the Royal Dragoons. Old, wrinkled, and painted, she sat in a tapestried chair reading *Evelina*, by Fanny Burney, and alarming Isobel's Mamma by scandalous stories of Georgian ladies who had been the beauties of Bath and Brighton and Tunbridge Wells in the days of Beau Brummel.

"I think you had better go and pick some flowers, dear," said Isobel's Mamma when Aunt Louisa's reminiscences threatened to become objectionable.

There was one memorable afternoon when Aunt Louisa

scandalized a tea-party of ladies, including the wives of two local vicars, by confiding to them that she had given her garter to one of her lovers before he went out to the Peninsular War and was killed at the siege of Badajoz.

Cries of alarm and horror rose from the tea-table. One of the vicars' ladies left hurriedly with her daughter. Isobel's mamma blushed crimson.

"Aunt Louisa! Really I am *ashamed* of you. How *very* wicked you must have been as a young woman!"

Aunt Louisa laughed like an old witch, and there were a million wrinkles on her parchment skin through all its paint and enamel.

"Times have changed, my dear," she cackled. "We had some spirit when I was a pretty young gal with a dozen beaux at my feet. Young men knew how to make love in those days. Now you are all afraid of life. I don't hold with this middle-class virtue which has come over England. *Bourgeois*, I call it. Smug! It's all the fault of the Prince Consort with his German ideas. A prig of the first water, in my opinion. I prefer the French—the *joie de vivre*. I remember when the Marquis de Polignac fell in love with me——"

"I think we had better be going, dear," said Isobel's Mamma hurriedly.

That remark about the dear Prince Consort was like blasphemy to the ladies of Surrey. They could only forgive it by the pity due to an old lady in her second childhood.

Then there was Uncle John, the Earl of Abinger, who lived in a big Georgian house surrounded by a great park in which deer roamed. He was nearly ninety when Isobel was a girl of fourteen, and he still wore an old-fashioned coat with a tight waist and a big collar with a heavy stock round his neck. With a fine old face of polished ivory, clear cut like a cameo, he had charming manners and behaved to Isobel as though she were a grown-up woman for whom he had a particular admiration. He had once kissed the hand of Marie Antoinette as now he raised Isobel's hand to his thin old lips. Strange that there should be someone still living—I happen to know her—who talked with an eye-witness of history in France before heads began to fall in the basket of the guillotine.

Isobel's girlhood at Alderton House is a memory of country life sheltered behind its ramparts of rank and wealth, which seemed impregnable and utterly secure . . . until a world war and death duties and the advance of democracy made breaches in its garden walls and let in the jerry builder and spoilt the beauty of

rural England and destroyed an aristocracy which had many faults—a belief that their human clay was somehow different from that of the common herd—and, among the best of them, many virtues of kindness and elegance and courage and charm. She assures me that even the weather was better in those days, with long golden summers. She still believes that life on the whole was happier in the days of her girlhood for people above the poverty line, with less fretfulness to the nerves and with more faith and idealism.

“We hadn’t found out so much,” she says. “We weren’t such realists. If we lived in a world of illusion, as we did, it was a pleasant illusion. Some of us weren’t quite so virtuous as we pretended, but most of us tried to live up to a moral standard, and were ashamed of ourselves if we dropped below it. Oh, we were arrogant, certainly, and thought one Englishman could whip three foreigners—and we believed that God had destined us to rule many races for their good and our advantage—but we had enthusiasm and high spirits. The world has gained a lot of good things—the radio, the flying machine, freedom of thought, the death of Mother Grundyism, the release from intolerance, the liberty of womanhood—but it has lost something in the process. Simplicity. Hero-worship. Romance. As a girl I was a romantic little ass, steeped in poetry and sentiment. But it was very pleasant while it lasted. I wasn’t happier when I learnt that romance is sometimes only a mirage and that sentiment may cover a mass of insincerity. Still, I wouldn’t put the clock back! The girls of to-day have quite a good time. Life is more amusing for more people.”

Romance and sentiment touched the heart of the youthful Isobel when Richard brought some of his Eton friends to stay with him in the holidays. One of them particularly attracted her favour because of his likeness to her imaginary portrait of Sir Galahad in the *Idylls of the King*. It was a boy named Arthur Mannington, who was in Richard’s house at Eton—the famous Evans’s—and who, as the son of Lord Amersham, would one day inherit many broad fields in Hertfordshire, a famous racing stable, a Tudor mansion, a town house in St. James’s Square, and, of course, a seat in the House of Lords, where his father supported the Tory leadership of Lord Derby.

He was a tall, slim youth with very fair hair, almost golden, and shy blue eyes, being a great contrast to the stockiness of Richard with his ruddy cheeks and brown curls and rowdy manners.

"A bit of a milksop," said Richard, "but not bad really. He lets me crib his Latin verse. That's why I've asked him down. I must say he can ride all right and he's first class as a cox. He and I are wet bobs in the same boat."

Isobel broke down his shyness somewhat after the first week. She liked him because of his devotion to Richard, whom he admired for all the qualities he lacked himself—cheek, physical strength, rowdiness, and fearlessness.

"I hate being flogged," he confided to Isobel, "but Richard takes it with a grin. I'm afraid I'm a bit of a coward really."

"Oh no!" said Isobel. "You took that fence this morning without a blink. I expect you're a bit delicate. That's all. Are you fond of reading—poetry and all that?"

He was passionately devoted to poetry, although he had to hide the fact at Eton, where they thought it very soppy. Like Isobel, he "wallowed"—he said—in the *Idylls of the King*.

"I'm not surprised," said Isobel. "You know, you're rather like Sir Galahad. In appearance, I mean."

Arthur Mannington blushed painfully.

"Oh, not in the least," he protested. "Don't say that to Richard. I should never hear the last of it. They call me Daisy at Eton."

"How rude and unkind!" cried Isobel. "I don't think you're a bit like a daisy. You're more like a marigold!"

While Richard was ratting one day in an old barn with two of his terriers, Isobel sat on the lawn with Arthur discussing *Quentin Durward* and other novels by Sir Walter Scott, for which they both had a passionate admiration.

"It is a pity there's no more chivalry," said Isobel. "We ought to have more pomp and pageantry nowadays, don't you think?"

Arthur Mannington smiled at her in his shy way.

"I dare say there's still room for chivalry, although we don't dress up so much."

"Men aren't chivalrous any more," said Isobel. "Richard has absolutely *no* manners. He thinks nothing of pinching my legs and arms."

"That's because you're brother and sister," explained Mannington. "He wouldn't behave like that to one of my sisters."

"Do you pinch *your* sisters and call them stable names?" asked Isobel.

Arthur Mannington laughed and shook his head.

"I wasn't born that way. I'm a bit—well—shy, you know."

"I like shy boys," said Isobel.

She liked Arthur. They had long talks together. One day he made her a daisy chain in the meadow beyond the long copse and put it on her hair, and pretended that she was a princess and that he was her knight.

"What the dickens are you two kids playing at?" asked Richard when he came searching for them with a dog at his heels. "Baby stuff, I call it."

Arthur blushed like a schoolgirl. He had been down on one knee before Isobel and was abashed at being found in this ridiculous position by a fellow "wet-bob" at Eton.

"We were just play-acting," he explained.

But Isobel put the daisy chain away in one of her cupboards as a sentimental memento and was furious one day with Miss Venables for clearing it out with some caterpillars which she was also keeping.

There were other holidays when Arthur Mannington stayed with them, and when, from a shy boy of twelve or so, he grew into a tall young man in the upper form at Eton, with a faint touch of gold on each cheek as the first faint trace of manhood's whiskers. Isobel came to regard him almost as a second brother because he came so much with Richard between the terms, unless she and Richard stayed with him at Amersham. Always for the first week or two he was shy with her again, but after that they talked freely like brother and sister. He was more thoughtful than the other boys she knew. He read a great deal and won the poetry prize at Eton. He had very noble ideas about life and his own place in the scheme of things.

"My father thinks I'm a bit of a nincompoop because I'm not keen on racing and hunting," he confided to her once. "But I've an idea that there are better things to do than that."

"What kind of things?"

"*Noblesse oblige*," he answered vaguely. "The aristocracy ought to lead the people better. We ought to use our wealth more fairly."

Isobel opened her eyes very wide.

"You're not becoming a Radical, are you?"

"Not quite a Liberal yet," he told her. "But I'm all on the side of the people. I've been reading some stuff by a fellow called William Morris. It's remarkably fine. It makes one think. You ought to get hold of it."

"I shall have to hide it from Papa if it's Radical stuff," said Isobel. "He thinks England is doomed to go through a fearful

revolution if the governing classes pander to the mob so much."

"It will be the fault of the governing classes if it happens," said Arthur Mannington gravely.

Strange talk for two young people in the Victorian era, yet at fifteen years of age or thereabouts they talked like that now and then, if I can believe an old lady who looks back on this girlhood as though it were yesterday. Perhaps she merges it into other conversations which happened later when Arthur, Viscount Mannington, was one of the members of the Liberal Party before entering the House of Lords as the Earl of Amersham.

At this time when they were boy and girl together she had a romantic admiration for her brother's school friend, but nothing more than that. She gave him her cheek to kiss when they met and parted. She answered his letters in a schoolgirl scrawl when he went abroad with his father and mother after a breakdown in health from over-study for a time. But not until later was she touched by the passionate devotion of this intellectual and serious young man who, as she now knows, had dedicated his heart to her from boyhood—that day when he put a crown of daisies on her hair and swore fealty as her knight on bended knee. How sentimental it sounds! How extraordinarily old-fashioned it is. Could any boy of to-day go down on bended knee before any short-frocked girl swinging a golf club over a stretch of turf?

V

It was when Isobel was sixteen that she became slightly sentimental about Mr. Thorpe, who, now that Richard went to Eton, remained on to teach her Latin and history—mostly Greek and Roman. He was a delicate young man who had been destined for the Church, but had had conscientious scruples, which he kept locked within his breast because any reference to such doubts as had disturbed his faith would have aroused distress in the household of Lord Alderton, to whom he had been strongly recommended by the Bishop of Worcester in whose diocese his father was a curate. Isobel's affection was purely romantic, as she now assures me. "Just schoolgirl nonsense, my dear!" It was because of the melancholy look in his eyes and the lock of black hair which fell over his forehead, and the deep signs which he heaved during morning prayers and other moments of meditation. He was a timid young man, afraid of horses and dogs, to which Isobel was devoted, and his most violent form of exercise was a game of croquet with the ladies. Even then, owing to his chivalry, he could hardly bring himself to *roquet* off an opponent's ball, especially when he was playing against Isobel's Mamma, who laughed at him.

"Send me off the court, Mr. Thorpe!"

"Oh, I daren't, my lady! It seems so disrespectful!"

"But it's the game, Mr. Thorpe. You'll never win if you play like that. You must be ruthless and brutal. Croquet is a game of sheer brutality!"

"Oh, but I simply couldn't be brutal with your ladyship!"

It was but a feeble knock that he gave her ball.

It was indoors rather than out of doors that Mr. Thorpe shone in his own sphere. He read poetry divinely, and made Isobel shed tears one day when he read out "Lady Geraldine's Courtship" by Elizabeth Barrett Browning. It was the story of a haughty young woman of the noble class who invites a lowly-born young man—a poet—to her country mansion.

"There are none of England's daughters who can show a prouder presence
Upon princely suitors praying, she has looked in her disdain.
She was sprung of English nobles, I was born of English peasants :
What was *I* that I should love her, save for competence to pain ?"

Mr. Thorpe read these lines with such intense emotion that Isobel wondered for a moment whether he contrasted his own position with hers, and indeed, as the poem proceeded, she became convinced that this thought was in his mind, because the lady's house in the poem was very much like Alderton.

"In that ancient hall of Wycombe thronged the numerous guests invited,
And the lovely London ladies trod the floors with gliding feet ;
And their voices low with fashion, not with feeling, softly freighted
All the air about the windows with elastic laughters sweet."

Isobel desired an explanation at this point.

"What *are* elastic laughters, Mr. Thorpe ? Isn't that a little absurd ?"

Mr. Thorpe was distressed.

"Lady Isobel ! I beg of you. This is a very beautiful poem."

He read out the verses in which the young poet is stirred by a deep passion for the lady, who talks to him graciously in her gardens, and then feels himself slighted by the behaviour of her guests, and in a dreadful moment overhears her declare that :

". . . . Whom I marry, shall be noble,
Ay, and wealthy. I shall never blush to think how he was born."

When he meets her again he upbraids her for her arrogance, her love of rank and wealth, her scorn of humbly born men. What right has she, he asks with dreadful bitterness, to despise a man of the middle class as though he were a mere pariah of the outer world ?

"As it is—your ermined pride, I swear, shall feel this stain upon her,
That *I*, poor, weak, tost with passion, scorned by me and you again,
Love you, madam, dare to love you, to my grief and your dishonour,
To my endless desolation, and your impotent disdain !"

Mr. Thorpe's voice spoke these words with as much bitterness as though he were the poet who had written them out of a burning heart to a woman whom he loved but who had scorned him, as he thought, from her high position.

"She ought to have been whipped !" cried Isobel. "I think it was perfectly *horrid* of her."

"It was a mistake," said Mr. Thorpe in a low voice. "She really loved him. When she swore that she would only marry a man who was noble and wealthy, she meant a man who was noble in his soul and wealthy in his heart. If you will excuse me, Lady Isobel, I don't think I will go on to the end. I find it rather too affecting."

"Oh, but do. I insist. It's enchanting. And I am so sorry for the poor young poet."

"No, please. Forgive me. There are some things which are really too emotional to be read aloud."

"He loves me," thought Isobel. "He thinks I am haughty and proud because he is the son of a curate. He is probably burning with passion for me. How wonderfully exciting! But of course I couldn't possibly marry him."

Mr. Thorpe mastered his emotion, although he refused to read the whole poem.

"The end is really too romantic," he explained. "A noble lady like that really could *not* marry an impecunious poet, according to the social customs of our time. We prate of liberty. We pretend that we reverence men of learning and sensibility. Society nowadays is supposed to be very tolerant. It's false! Our class distinctions are insurmountable. The aristocracy is as feudal as its forefathers. What would happen if I were to propose to a noble young lady, if I dared to confess my love for her?"

He laughed in a hollow way which was dreadful to hear. He flung back his black lock from his forehead with an impatient hand.

"I am sure the lady ought to feel very much pleased," said Isobel. "Of course she might not get her Papa's consent."

Mr. Thorpe repeated her last words with frightful irony.

"Her Papa's consent! No, indeed! He would be kicked out of the house ignominiously. . . . And he would deserve to be, for such outrageous impudence. The man would be a fool to think that he could break down the high barriers of caste."

"It seems very unjust," said Isobel. "If ever I fall in love with a poor young man I shall escape from this social caste of ours."

She put her hand on Mr. Thorpe's sleeve.

"Mr. Thorpe," she said, "may I ask you a question in great confidence?"

He looked at her gloomily and nodded.

"Are you by any chance a Liberal?"

Mr. Thorpe started and glanced towards the study door.

"I have a very great respect for Mr. Gladstone," he said in a low voice.

Isobel drew a deep breath. It was an incredible and exciting confession. The name of Mr. Gladstone was never mentioned at Alderton without dislike and disgust.

"For heaven's sake do not tell your noble father or her ladyship," said Mr. Thorpe, suddenly stricken with terror at this self-betrayal.

Isobel promised solemnly.

"It's *our* secret," she told him. "The Inglebys do not betray their friends. *Semper fidelis*, you know."

VI

It was some time after the reading of "Lady Geraldine's Courtship" that Isobel discovered the secret of Mr. Thorpe's emotion. It was alarming and tragic, yet extremely exciting as a revelation of romantic passion seething beneath the placid, decorous and uneventful life which passed so smoothly at Alderton. It was by accident and a little naughtiness that Isobel became a hidden witness of a scene which thrilled her with exquisite emotion. It was due to her desire to read the *Poems and Ballads* of Algernon Charles Swinburne, which had just been published and attacked in the Press with great violence as an extremely wicked work calculated to debase the mind of English youth and to outrage the moral tone of a land so nobly governed by a gracious Queen and Mother.

It had been sent to Mr. Thorpe by a literary friend, and, carelessly, he had left it lying under an apple tree in the orchard, where Isobel had found it. Hardly had she read the first few verses, enchanted by their music with a lilt in the lines which had set her pulse beating with some secret magic, when her Mamma, who was sitting beside her in a garden chair reading Mr. Thackeray's *Virginians*, peeped over her shoulder and took the book out of her hands.

"Let me see, my dear. Swinburne? I seem to have heard that he isn't quite *nice*!"

"Oh, I think it's wonderful, Mamma. Like enchanted music."

Lady Alderton read one of the poems, and Isobel saw a faint flush of colour creep into her mother's face, making it more beautiful.

"My dear child," she exclaimed, with a nervous little laugh, "you really must *not* read this kind of thing! It's—alarming. However did it come into the house?"

Mr. Thorpe came hurrying into the orchard, searching for something.

"Excuse me," he said with some agitation. "I dropped a book here . . ."

"Not a very nice book, Mr. Thorpe," said Lady Alderton, raising her finger at him with a smiling reproof. "Isobel has been reading it, much to my alarm."

"Good gracious!" cried Mr. Thorpe, as though the earth had opened under his feet. His face had become quite pale.

"But, Mamma," exclaimed Isobel, "I am quite old enough to read *anything*! Surely I ought to know what life means, now that I am nearly sixteen. Besides, it is perfectly beautiful, as far as I read."

"Perhaps I had better read a little more," said Lady Alderton. "I don't like to be narrow-minded, but some of these modern books are really *quite* dangerous, my darling. Wait till you get older."

"Oh, Mamma, how very absurd, really!"

"I am afraid you are becoming a little disrespectful, my dear," said Isobel's Mamma reprovingly.

Mr. Thorpe was still agitated.

"I must apologize for leaving it about so carelessly. I admit it is not the kind of poetry which I would recommend to a young lady."

The end of it was that Isobel's Mamma carried the book into the house with her and at tea that afternoon informed Isobel that with Mr. Thorpe's consent she had put it into the library among other books belonging to Papa which were not quite suitable for general reading.

"I do not want my Isobel's mind to be hurt by wicked nonsense," she explained, gently but firmly. "Mr. Thorpe entirely agrees with me that some of the verses are hardly proper. Do you not, Mr. Thorpe?"

That young man bowed and blushed.

"Unpardonable!" he said. "I really cannot forgive myself."

For the rest of the time during afternoon tea he sat silently, with an occasional sigh which seemed to come from his very heart. Once or twice Lady Alderton glanced at him as though wondering what was the matter with him. She turned to Miss Venables and engaged her in conversation about a family in the village which was in distress owing to the father having been sent to prison for poaching.

"I want you to take them down something to eat, poor dears. I feel very sorry for them with such a wicked father. I pleaded with his lordship to give the man another chance, but he has been an habitual poacher. Of course his lordship could not interfere with the Law, *however* severe."

Lady Alderton sighed, perhaps because in the tenderness of her heart she disapproved of the Law's severity and of her husband's refusal to listen to her plea for pity.

Isobel was sulky. She passionately desired to read Mr. Swinburne's verses. Something in their rhythm had stirred her senses, and she resented being treated like a baby when she was getting grown up.

That evening, after dinner, when she had retired to her room for night, she waited until Miss Venables had gone to her room down the corridor, and, after putting on her dressing-gown over her nightdress, crept downstairs with the guilty intention of regaining possession of Mr. Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads* for an hour's secret and unholy enjoyment. Her father was up in town on political business. Richard was away at Eton. Mamma would be writing letters as usual in her boudoir. Mr. Thorpe would be in his own room, to which he always went after dinner. The footmen and maids would be in their own quarters. The coast was clear.

She slipped into the library and lit the candles over the mantelpiece and searched round for the book, which was but a slim volume. Suddenly, to her consternation, she heard footsteps outside the door and a little cough which she knew to be that of Mr. Thorpe.

Quick as lightning, she fled behind a curtain. Despite certain tendencies towards sinfulness which alarmed her conscience at times, she was not so utterly shameless as to be discovered in her nightdress by a young man without alarm and apprehension of the most distressful kind.

Mr. Thorpe came into the room and she heard him strike some matches and light some more candles. Once he groaned deeply, in a most agonizing way. Then, a few moments later, the door opened again and Isobel's Mamma came in.

"I have come, Mr. Thorpe," she said gently, and yet with a tone of reproof. "What do you want to say to me? After that extraordinary note of yours, I am really at a loss to understand."

"Oh, my lady," said Mr. Thorpe in a trembling voice, "I dare not ask you to forgive me. I am mad. I am utterly distraught. All I can do is to throw myself at your feet and beg for your understanding and pity."

He did not throw himself at the feet of Lady Alderton, but, staring out between the folded curtains which concealed her, Isobel saw him drop down on both knees in front of her Mamma.

Lady Alderton spoke to him almost sharply, and yet there was a kind of tenderness in her voice.

"Mr. Thorpe! Please, please! Control yourself, I beg of you. How can you be so silly? So disrespectful, even?"

Mr. Thorpe's voice broke as though his heart were also broken. "Silly, yes!" he said wildly. "But disrespectful, no a thousand times! I have more than respect for you, dear Lady Alderton. I have an adoration. My love is untainted by any baseness. It is because I find your beauty so wonderful, and your daily kindness so angelic, that I ask you to dismiss me from your service. How is it possible for a young man like me, lonely and sensitive, to remain in the same house with your ladyship without being tortured by a love which can never be returned and which only folly allowed me to confess?"

"Folly, indeed!" said Lady Alderton, laughing, and yet without cruelty. "If I did not think you so *very* foolish, I should be extremely angry with you. Think what his lordship would say if I were to tell him!"

"Perhaps it is your duty to tell him," said Mr. Thorpe in a most tragic voice. "I am well aware that his lordship would be justified in flinging me out of this house with the utmost ignominy. I am ready to suffer even that, if your ladyship will forgive me and understand my irresistible passion."

"Passion?" cried Lady Alderton, quite angrily this time. "Are you not forgetting yourself, sir?"

"A pure passion," said Mr. Thorpe. "The humblest adoration of a subject for his Queen. I worship you, dear Lady Alderton. Ever since I have been here I have thought each day happy if I could have one smile from you. To play croquet with you was an exquisite delight, and yet at the same time a moral torture. I have never known a mother's love——"

Lady Alderton laughed quite merrily.

"Are you suggesting that I am old enough to be your mother, Mr. Thorpe? That is hardly true, although I am the mother of a tall girl who happens to be your pupil."

Mr. Thorpe was no longer on his knees. He had risen to his feet, and now thrust his hand through his hair, flinging back that lock which fell over his forehead.

"You mistake my meaning," he protested. "When I said I had never known a mother's love, I meant that I am a man who has been deprived of womanly affection. I have never been kissed by tender lips. I have never been cherished."

"Really, Mr. Thorpe," said Lady Alderton, "you cannot expect to be cherished by me."

"Oh, my lady, I am not accountable for my words!" cried the young man. "I cannot explain myself. All I beg of you is to accept my resignation and let me leave a household where your beauty is more than I can bear."

"Yes," said Lady Alderton, "I think you had better go, Mr. Thorpe. I can no longer trust you with my daughter's education. I thought you were a young man of honour and good sense. I see I have been mistaken."

Mr. Thorpe stood before her with bowed head, as Isobel could see through the folds of the curtain. Suddenly he turned his head away and put his hand up to his eyes and sobbed.

"Love is terrible!" he cried in a strangled voice.

For a moment Lady Alderton stood irresolute, frightened, and yet pitiful.

"Mr. Thorpe," she said gently, "my poor young man! My poor boy! I am so sorry I have made you unhappy. But you see how absurd it is, don't you? I am Lady Alderton, a wife and mother. I am not angry with you really. I am only distressed. Please calm yourself. I cannot bear to see you cry like that."

She went close to him, put her hand on his arm, and kissed him on the forehead as he bowed his head before her.

"There!" she said. "A motherly kiss, my dear. And now we must invent some excuse to tell his lordship why you wish to leave us."

She went towards the door, and turned round to look at him as he leaned against the high mantelpiece with his face on his arm. Isobel saw her mother in a new light—lovely and gracious as a young woman. Her eyes were filled with tenderness as she looked back at a romantic young man, ridiculous, and yet tragic, because he had said love was terrible and it tortured him. She wore an evening frock of black silk, very full and flowing, and her shoulders were bare above a lace shawl pinned crosswise at her breast, and on her hair, looped about her ears, was a little lace cap.

It came to Isobel as a revelation and a shock that her mother was young enough to be loved by men in a romantic and passionate way. Lady Alderton left the room and Mr. Thorpe remained some time longer, believing himself to be alone, so that he groaned very deeply and cried out upon his God, keeping

Isobel prisoner behind the curtain until he staggered away and went up to his room.

Isobel borrowed *Poems and Ballads* by Algernon Charles Swinburne, and read it late into the night. It explained some of the symptoms of poor Mr. Thorpe, who departed next day under a plea of ill health in a dog cart driven by one of the grooms, with his luggage on the tailboard behind. . . .

To Isobel, from whom he took a shy farewell, he left some of his books inscribed with respectful regards. He tipped the servants handsomely out of his savings from a weekly wage of thirty shillings. Miss Venables wept bitterly until her eyes were red. Little though he had guessed it, there was one woman in the world who was eager to cherish him.

That evening before dinner Isobel walked up and down the terrace with her arm round her mother's waist.

"Mamma," she said, "do you know how beautiful you are? Did you have many lovers before Papa came courting you?"

Lady Alderton blushed deeply and smacked her daughter's hand, which was tucked through her arm.

"Do not ask such outrageous questions, Isobel!" she said with a laugh. "You embarrass me. You ought not to think of such ideas."

"Love is terrible," said Isobel involuntarily, before she wished to bite off her tongue for saying these words.

Lady Alderton started and looked at her searchingly, with an expression of fear.

"Why do you say that?" she asked.

"I was just thinking," said Isobel. "Is love terrible, mother?"

"It is very dangerous," said Lady Alderton. "Sometimes it leads to great tragedy. But such subjects are not to be spoken about lightly. They must not even be *thought* about, my darling. Keep them out of your mind. One day before your marriage I will talk to you a little about such things, but until then I hope that you will have a sweet and innocent mind."

"Yes, Mamma," said Isobel meekly.

She wondered how much her beautiful mother had read of *Poems and Ballads* by Algernon Charles Swinburne, which were very thrilling.

VII

TWICE a year Isobel accompanied her family to London for three months at their town house in Belgrave Square. It was when Parliament was sitting in the autumn and when the Season—somewhat overshadowed by the retirement and mourning of Her Majesty—began in the first week of May. The change of residence was always exciting for a few days, and communicated itself to all the household, so that the maids rushed about on the task of packing up; and the footmen carried portmanteaux and trunks to be piled on to the family coach; and Mrs. Twining, the housekeeper, found a thousand things which had been forgotten, and scurried about like a benevolent old hen searching for her chickens; and Miss Venables became distracted because Isobel insisted upon squeezing some more of her books into bags already bursting beneath their straps. The footmen and maids preceded the family in a variety of vehicles—governess carts, dog carts, and the second-best brougham—as far as Dorking station, where they entrained with the luggage.

The Family, that is to say, Isobel and her mother—with Richard, if he happened to be back from Eton—joined by Miss Venables and Mrs. Twining, drove all the way to Belgrave Square in the coach-and-four, with his lordship handling the ribbons and two footmen in livery sitting behind. The Alderton arms, with the motto *Semper Fidelis*, was emblazoned on the panels. The horses had been groomed until they gleamed. His lordship, who was a fine whip and fond of horseflesh, looked noble in a double-breasted coat with a broad collar and enormous buttons, with a white top hat fixed sideways at a slant above his bushy eyebrows and full whiskers. Sometimes Isobel cajoled her father into letting her sit on the box by his side, and then it was amusing to watch the effect of their appearance on the road.

Field labourers pulled their forelocks as they stood by their ploughs or in their cabbage fields. Old women curtsied as the coach passed through the narrow villages of Shere and Abinger Hammer. Schoolboys cheered. Ragged urchins ran alongside

for a few yards, clamouring for pennies, until his lordship flicked his whip at them. Farm carts and governess carts pulled into the side of the road to let the coach pass. Chickens ran wildly into the hedges. The driver of the Dorking coach—a successor to Tony Weller—kissed his whip as he passed, and the conductor blew a salute to them with a fine flourish on his horn. Nearer London, on the other side of Kingston and on the outskirts of Hammersmith, less respect was visible on the faces of men and women who stared at the Alderton coach on its way to town. Slatternly women and haggard-looking men stood in the doorways of tumble-down cottages or rows of mean little dwellings with broken window-panes, and did not straighten themselves up or drop a curtsy because a noble lord was passing. Some of them looked with sullen eyes. Once a group of men standing outside a public-house shook their fists at his lordship and shouted filthy words at him when he splashed them with black mud on a rainy day.

“Chartist rabble,” said Isobel’s Papa. “The scoundrels would look good at the end of a rope. Mr. Gladstone and his Liberals are pandering to the mob. Those are the intelligent electors to whom they entrust the destiny of the nation! Even Mr. Disraeli enlarged their franchise out of sheer funk. Heaven knows what will happen to this country of ours with such a weakening of the governing spirit and all this Liberal sentiment affecting the upper classes. Nothing but philanthropy and soft soap. Now they propose to give free education to the masses. Madness, in my opinion. The way to revolution.”

“But, Papa,” said Isobel, “surely we ought to try and raise the character of the poor people. Education *must* be good for them.”

“It only puts dangerous ideas into their heads,” answered Isobel’s Papa. “What they ought to be taught is respect for their betters:

‘God bless the Squire and his relations
And keep us in our proper stations.’

People laugh at that now. I can see nothing to laugh at. It’s what I believe. But then, thank Heaven, I am an old-fashioned Tory, like Lord Derby and a few others.”

“But, Papa ——” said Isobel.

“Don’t argue with me, young woman,” said his lordship, giving a touch of the whip to the offside leader.

All that was exciting and delightful, but after the business of unpacking and settling down into the house in Belgrave Square life resumed a quiet routine again, and was not thrilling in its daily incidents to a young girl who was not yet old enough to take her place in Society, or even to appear at the dinner parties and receptions given downstairs during the Season.

Sometimes from her room upstairs, where she spent most of her time with Miss Venables and a German lady—"Fräulein", as she was called—who came to teach her that brain-racking language—she peeped over the banisters to get a glimpse of the guests coming up the great staircase to the drawing-room floor. She could hear their laughter and chatter and the rustle of silk gowns and the flutter of fans and feathers. She could sometimes hear the voices of the gentlemen, loud and hearty, greeting her mother who stood at the top of the staircase.

"My dear Lady Alderton, dare I say that you are looking more beautiful than ever?"

"How charming of you to invite me!"

She could see the tops of bald heads gleaming in the gas-light which had lately been installed instead of the old candelabra, which still hung from the ceilings. She could get a glimpse of oiled whiskers, gleaming shirt-fronts, bare and lovely shoulders. But it was like being kept out of Paradise. She had promised Fräulein to learn a list of irregular verbs before eleven o'clock next day. She was studying the geography of Russia with its chief rivers and towns with Miss Venables. How dull that was, compared with the wonderful party downstairs where she might talk to distinguished people who were doing great things in the world—statesmen, generals, diplomats, and even a foreign prince or two! It was absurd really to be treated as though she were a little girl without a mind of her own. But then Papa was so old-fashioned and severe. He did not believe in her appearing on these occasions. He had refused to hear of it when she had begged permission to come down in order to meet Mr. Disraeli again. She was just stuck up in a poky little room with poor old Venny and her lesson books. Drat the lesson books!

Fortunately there were other books, more exciting, like *Adam Bede* by George Eliot, and *Kenelm Chillingly* by Bulwer Lytton, with his other wonderful novels, which had opened up a new world to her, full of romantic possibilities.

Perhaps it was George Eliot more than any other writer who was developing her mind and making her think more seriously

about life, so that she could even sympathize with the Lower Orders for whom Papa had nothing but contempt and fear, although he was kind and just to the people on his own estate if they kept away from poaching and other crimes. She was beginning to think that the Middle Classes had the best of it, because they had more freedom. But of course she did not know very much about them yet, except what she read in books.

Sometimes, in her bedroom, when she ought to have been asleep, she leaned out of the window, watching things down below in Belgrave Square, and listening to the sounds that came up to her. There was a dull red light in the sky eastwards over London. What strange things were happening in the East End, of which Miss Venables talked sometimes as though it were full of wild beasts. Men were beating their wives and murdering each other. Drunken people were shouting and screaming. Dreadful women, like some of those who stared at the Alderton coach, were fighting the police. Poor seamstresses were sewing and starving in garret rooms like the one in a poem she had read by Thomas Hood. She knew very little of that side of life except what she had read in novels by Charles Dickens. . . .

Down in Belgrave Square a policeman in a top hat stood under a gaslight. Two ragged men slouched by, and he turned his bull's-eye lantern on them and spoke gruffly, so that they shuffled on faster. Carriages waited outside the big houses, and Isobel could hear the footmen laughing and talking. Once a well-dressed young man—she could see his tall hat cocked sideways on his head, and the gleam of a silver-knobbed stick—jumped out of a hansom cab and began abusing the cabby. Presently he held on to the lamp-post as though he could not stand properly. The cab drove off with a clatter of hoofs, and the young man began to sing in a funny way, until a girl—quite nicely dressed she looked—came by and then turned and spoke to him.

"Coming home with me, dearie?"

Isobel could hear her voice quite clearly in the silence of Belgrave Square.

"I will go anywhere in the world with you, dear lady," said the young man. "I am exceedingly the worse for drink. I am distinctly soused, if I may say so."

"Well, come on, dearie. Just as far as the Pimlico Road."

"Exquisite creature!" said the young man.

She tucked her hand through his arm and he staggered across the square with her.

Isobel was aware that she lived in a sheltered world, guarded from dangerous and sinister facts at which she could only vaguely guess. Downstairs were her father's guests—handsome gentlemen, lovely ladies, the nobility and gentry of the land to whose class she belonged. It did not occur to her at this time that they could be accused of any selfishness or callousness because there was so much poverty and suffering around them. Doubtless such a thought did not occur to themselves. Life, as they knew it, was like that. Only here and there did members of their class, like Lord Shaftesbury, become conscience-stricken at the contrasts between wealth and poverty, and do something to reduce its cruelty. Nor did Isobel, as a young girl—she tells me now—have any suspicion that among her father's guests were gentlemen not quite so noble as their names, and not so strictly virtuous as they looked on a Sunday morning when she saw them pass in their broughams to St. Peter's, Eaton Square, with their ladies.

VIII

THE day came—it was in 1868—when Isobel Ingleby was presented at Court, not to the Queen, who was still in the deepest mourning for Albert the Good, but to the Prince and Princess of Wales, who relieved Her Majesty of this social duty. *The Times* newspaper recorded history of more importance. A Republic had been proclaimed in Spain. A General Election was approaching in England and already intense political excitement had been aroused. It was already assumed in the Reform Club that the Liberals would defeat Mr. Disraeli and that Mr. Gladstone would be called upon to kiss hands as Prime Minister. The young Marquess of Hastings had died after a notorious career on the Turf, and *The Times* published a leading article holding him up as a dreadful example of depravity which had disgraced the Order of Nobility to which he belonged and had cast an unjustified slur upon the noble traditions of English Sport, so finely upheld by the Prince of Wales and the great gentlemen of England.

Other items of news appeared on the day when Isobel Ingleby and other young ladies of her age and caste were to be arrayed in the glory of their Court dresses. A young woman in Bermondsey was charged with throwing vitriol over a middle-aged man whom she alleged to be the father of her child. Colonel Fitzgerald de Montmorency Smith was summoned at Bow Street for disorderly behaviour, the police alleging that he had been in an intoxicated condition and had threatened to fight the entire police force when two constables had arrested him. The gallant colonel pleaded that he had been celebrating the anniversary of the Battle of Waterloo, and was fined two guineas and costs. A woman of respectable appearance jumped over Waterloo Bridge and evidence was brought that she was a seamstress in Brick Lane, Walworth, with two children, who were found in a starving condition. There was no reference in the news paragraph to the fact that this unfortunate young woman had been working for a firm of Court milliners who paid her sweated

wages for sewing hooks and eyes on to the white gowns to be worn by the lovely young *débutantes* at Buckingham Palace.

When Isobel Ingleby arrayed herself in one of those billowing frocks she did not guess that the crisped fingers of a starving woman had touched it, nor that an emaciated creature, listening to the wail of hungry children, had left the last hook unsewn before she crept out into a wet darkness and stood a little while by the parapet of Waterloo Bridge until a police constable heard a cry in the inky waters below.

Nothing spoilt the happiness of Lady Isobel Ingleby that evening. She was excited by the joyous thought of this ceremony, for which she had been rehearsing at Mr. D'Egville's Academy of Dancing and Deportment with other young creatures, who were taught to walk, to turn, to curtsy, with grace and elegance. Mr. D'Egville had been unable to silence their laughter and chatter, their giggles and their whisperings. To Isobel all this was the outward and visible sign that she was no longer a gawky girl to be kept with governesses and servants in the background, but a young lady who had "come out" and was ready for life's adventure. After to-night she would go down to dinner with Papa and Mamma when they were entertaining distinguished company. After to-night she would be free to take her place in Society. Young men would pay her homage. Love would be waiting for her. Life would be vastly more amusing.

Poor Miss Venables was stricken by these thoughts which came dancing into Isobel's mind. Her eyes and even the tip of her nose were reddened by weeping.

"Oh, my darling young lady," she cried, "I am afraid I shall lose you now that you are making your curtsy to the Prince and Princess! You will not need your poor old governess any longer."

"Good gracious, yes!" laughed Isobel. "I shall always need you, Venny. You and I will have lots of adventures together."

Miss Venables sniffed miserably.

"There's a hook missing from your placket," she said. "Those milliners are very careless."

Isobel's Mamma came in, looking enchanting in her Court dress, with high feathers and a lace shawl once worn by Marie Antoinette, who had given it to Aunt Louisa.

She kissed Isobel on her bare shoulder. "You look lovely, darling."

Then she sighed because of the same sadness which had afflicted Miss Venables.

"You will be 'out' to-morrow—like a butterfly! I have lost my naughty Tomboy. To-morrow I shall feel older, with a grown-up daughter."

"I shall never be as beautiful as you, Mamma! How wonderful you look. I am sure all the gentlemen will fall in love with you again!"

"My dear! What dreadful things you say!"

Isobel's Mamma laughed and blushed, which made her look even more beautiful.

Richard came in to have a "squint" at her as he said. He was at Oxford now, and there was the first faint trace of the whiskers which afterwards flourished exceedingly. He grinned when Isobel swooned into a deep curtsy as though he were the Prince of Wales.

"Not too bad!" he remarked. "It's a pity you have a snub nose, but I suppose that isn't your fault. I dare say some of the swells will get soft about you!"

"Pig!" cried Isobel, springing up and rumpling his hair, to the great danger of her Court dress. "Snub nose, indeed! It is purest Grecian!"

Mrs. Twining, who had come upstairs to see the young lady, cried out in horror at this recklessness. "Oh, my dear young lady! For mercy's sake do not rumple your pretty frock!"

Two of the maids peeped in at the door, until Isobel called them in to see her in all her glory. Robert, the footman, in full livery, with powdered wig, paid her a pretty compliment as she swept downstairs with her long train.

"A sight for sore eyes, my lady, if I may say so."

"You may say so, Robert!" she assured him. "I am glad you think so."

"His lordship desires a word with you, my lady," said Robert, stooping to lift her train down the hall.

Isobel went to her father's study and tapped at the door. She would never have dared to enter without permission.

"Come in!"

She opened the door and then closed it behind her as she stood with her back to it, smiling at him and waiting for his admiration and approval.

She knew then that he was a shy man, because, after one glance at her, he turned and fiddled with some papers at his desk.

"You look very charming, Isobel," he said.

"Thank you, Papa."

"I feel it my duty to say a few words to you, my dear, now that you are entering Society."

"Yes, Papa."

It did not occur to him to invite her to sit down, which, indeed, would have been inadvisable before the presentation without the grave danger of creasing her white splendour.

"It is a great day in your life," said his lordship gravely. "To-morrow you will take your place as a young woman in the world after your sheltered girlhood."

"Yes, Papa."

"I hope and believe," said his lordship, coughing slightly, "that you will comport yourself with dignity and discretion, remembering your station in life and your upbringing in a Christian home. There are, I regret to say, many temptations for young women of to-day. All this talk of liberty—all this freedom of thought, and so on. In spite of the high moral example set by our most gracious Queen, there is a great deal of loose thought and behaviour among our young men and women. No doubt, my dear, men will make love to you."

"Oh, Papa!" cried Isobel, looking demure, but with a secret leap in her heart.

"It is inevitable," said his lordship. "You are a beautiful young woman. Men will pay homage to you. They will talk romantic nonsense to you. And some of them, I am sorry to say, will be blackguards, without respect for women's virtue, even though they bear noble names. Apart from that, Society is opening its doors to all kinds of queer fish. Poets. Literary men. Journalists. Vagabonds who hardly know their own grandfathers! I tremble to think that your happiness—our family name and honour—may be endangered by some plausible scoundrel of that kind betraying your confidence by glib speech. You will be marked down, Isobel, by fortune-hunters and adventurers. You will meet men of no character, or bad character, infected by the immorality of the French, by the objectionable doctrines of Liberalism, or by the anti-English and Romanizing tendencies of the Ritualists. I trust you, my dear Isobel, to be on your guard against all that. Remember that your father is an Evangelical and a staunch upholder of Church and State. Remember the duty you owe to a great name and the virtue which has been taught you as a pure and innocent girl. That is all I have to say—except God bless you, my dear!"

"Thank you, Papa. Thank you a thousand times."

Isobel was much impressed by this paternal lecture. It was exactly what she had expected and entirely in keeping with her father's character and gravity of mind. But somewhere down in her subconscious mind—that mysterious region not yet revealed in psychology—were little merry devils tempting her to find a joyous anticipation in the very dangers against which her father warned her. Men would make love to her! How wonderful! They would talk romantic nonsense to her! How delightful and amusing! She might meet those queer fish—poets, literary men, journalists—whom her father described as vagabonds. How exciting and enchanting! She had never met a poet of more distinction than Mr. Thorpe. She had never met a professional literary man. If only one day she could meet Mr. Charles Dickens or Mr. Algernon Charles Swinburne or Mr. Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Of course it might be dreadful to meet a Ritualist. . . .

She drove with her mother in the best brougham, with two footmen behind, to Buckingham Palace. There was a block of carriages in the Green Park, and a crowd of rough-looking people stood on each side, staring in at the windows. A small boy with a grubby face put his tongue out at Lady Isobel Ingleby. Sullen eyes stared at her beauty. There were men like beasts in the crowd, with lank hair falling over their eyes, and clawlike hands with which they scratched themselves beneath their rags. Mounted police drove them back. There were scuffles with the top-hatted constables. A woman screamed out dreadful words.

Isobel's Mamma became rather pale.

"How very disgraceful!" she exclaimed. "Really the police ought to give us more protection."

"It reminds me of Mr. Carlyle's French Revolution," said Isobel. "Some of those women are like the *tricoteuses*."

Lady Alderton shuddered. She had heard terrible stories of the French Revolution from old Aunt Louisa and Uncle John, who had known beautiful women and gallant men whose heads had been sliced off by the guillotine after that journey in the tumbrils through the shrieking crowds.

"Isobel, my dear, do not speak of it! It frightens me!"

"Perhaps we shall have a Revolution in England one day," said Isobel very cheerfully. She was pleased to imagine herself standing on a tumbril with her white neck bare, looking scornfully at the mob below. Arthur Mannington would be with her, perhaps, with his fair hair glinting in the sunlight and his blue eyes disdainful of death. Or he might be afraid and she would

hold his hand and say, "Let us die bravely, my dear. *Noblesse oblige !*"

Lady Isobel Ingleby made her curtsy to a lady of great beauty who was the Princess of Wales, and to a tall, plump young man with fair hair curling about his face who was the Heir Apparent, looking bored sometimes until a pretty girl appeared.

Isobel had "come out".

IX

It was through Arthur, Viscount Mannington, son of Lord Amersham, that Isobel Ingleby met some of those queer fish—painters, poets, literary men and journalists—against whom her father had warned her as undesirable friends.

Arthur had gone up to Oxford at the same time as Richard, and they had shared rooms together, though not much more than that in University life. Richard had become one of the bloods of Christ Church, with a hunter of his own, and a well-bred horse which he drove in a high dog cart to the admiration of his friends not so well provided with pocket money. Arthur could well have afforded these luxuries, had he desired them, but he “eschewed delight and lived laborious days”, to the satisfaction of his tutor and the benevolent interest of Dr. Jowett, who at that time was the great brain of Oxford and the most enduring influence upon the mind of the younger intellectuals in the latter half of the Victorian era.

It is possible that Arthur might have been a poet if his father had not been a peer. Some of his verses—among them a sonnet entitled “To Isobel”—were published anonymously in the *Gentleman's Magazine*. Others, written in a fine, delicate script, have been pasted by Isobel herself into a book which contains lines addressed to her by Tennyson, Browning, Rossetti, and other luminaries of that golden age of poesy, which, strange as it may seem, coincided with the extending radius of Mr. Cubitt's stucco-fronted houses and the ravages of the jerry builder in the outer suburbs.

It was natural, therefore, that Arthur should belong to the literary set in Oxford and should cultivate the acquaintanceship of young gentlemen who had even the slightest introduction to Parnassus, situated at that time in the neighbourhood of Bloomsbury, with outposts in Chelsea, Hampstead, and Campden Hill. He was favoured by having a father and mother less suspicious of odd characters than Isobel's Papa and Mamma. Indeed, Lady Amersham was one of the noted hostesses of rank in London

Society who opened the doors of her house in St. James's Square to literary lions, and even to young cubs who tried to roar like lions of the forest before they had uttered more than a few juvenile growls or squeaks.

Her receptions and *soirées*, to which Isobel and her brother were invited, attracted the humorous attention of "Mr. Punch", who suggested that some of her ladyship's guests were carefully watched by the footmen lest they should run off with the spoons. Certainly some odd-looking characters appeared occasionally among the Nobility and Gentry who crowded those spacious rooms. Artists and literary men in those days were still in the Bohemian stage. If they wore evening clothes, their trousers were apt to be baggy, even though they had pressed them overnight beneath their mattresses, their hair was apt to be even longer and shaggier than the hairy fashion of the age permitted, their cuffs were sometimes frayed, and their shirt-fronts worn too obviously where the studs met the buttonholes.

Some of Isobel's girl friends giggled behind their fans at the passing of these oddities.

"Isobel, dearest, do look at that awful-looking man! Can he be an organ-grinder, do you think? Good gracious, I almost believe I shall *catch* something from him!"

"That, my dear Helen," said Isobel, "is a great novelist. It is the author of *Can She Forgive Him?* and *The Conscience of Lady Carstairs*. Tremendously famous—and I would give anything to talk to him! Perhaps Arthur will introduce me."

Or one of these girl friends would tug at one of Isobel's ribbons—it was the time when shoulders were bare above a little bodice high-waisted over the spreading crinoline—and whisper some impertinent nonsense about another celebrity.

"Isobel, is that a man or a monkey, do you think? Perhaps he will climb up the chandelier and scratch himself!"

Isobel was "not amused", as Her Majesty once remarked at a similar absurdity. She had a romantic enthusiasm for writing men, painters, musicians, and all artists, in spite of her father's warning as to their doubtful morals and perfidious intentions.

She was thrilled tremendously one night when Arthur, who was standing by her side, spoke in a low and awed voice.

"Thomas Carlyle! . . . Lady Harriet brought him as a favour to mother."

Thomas Carlyle looked as cross as a bear with a sore ear, and appeared in Lady Amersham's rooms like a man meditating on the downfall of civilization and the doom of Empires.

"Oh, Mr. Carlyle, how *very* kind of you to come!" cried Lady Amersham effusively.

Mr. Carlyle grunted.

"I am a great sufferer from insomnia, ma'am," he said with a strong Scotch burr. "I may as well keep awake here as in my own house in Cheyne Row. But it's good of you to ask me nevertheless, and I'm thankful to you."

"Arthur," whispered Isobel, clutching his sleeve, "to think that *The French Revolution* came out of that old head! And *Heroes and Hero-Worship*. Oh, I could go down on my knees to him!"

"He would hate it if you did," said Arthur. "But I'm just as thrilled as you are. It's a great honour to have him under one's roof."

He could not summon up courage to address this great philosopher, who was surrounded by a group of elders, listening reverentially to his desire to see a Man capable of ruling England in a time of decadence and mob-mentality.

Other celebrities passed through Lady Amersham's rooms during these *soirées*, and some of them now and then addressed a few words to Isobel Ingleby, because of her bright, eager eyes, and her charm of girlhood, and a shy homage she gave to them because of their fame and genius. Mr. Tennyson, who became a peer and the Poet Laureate many years later, held her little hand for a moment when she was presented to him by Lady Amersham, and she nearly swooned with excitement at the thought of getting one word even from the noble mind which had seen the vision of the *Idylls of the King*. He spoke more than one word. He spoke four, in a rich, organlike voice, while he stood above her with his flowing mane and beard.

"Good evening, young lady."

Then he turned to Lady Amersham and desired to know whether he could have a sandwich and a cup of coffee, as he had been walking on Wimbledon Common and was in need of nourishment.

Joachim, the great violinist, played one evening to Lady Amersham's guests, some of whom went on chattering until he dropped his bow for a moment, sighed deeply, and looked at them with melancholy, reproachful eyes. Lady Hallé accompanied him at the piano.

Mr. John Millais, the famous painter, who had been one of that group called the Pre-Raphaelites which had caused the fiercest controversy and the most vulgar abuse when Isobel

was still in the nursery, chatted with her for several minutes one evening, though they had not been introduced. After an introduction by Lady Amersham, he asked :

"Would you favour me by sitting to me for a picture? I need a head like yours for a subject I have in mind. I wouldn't take up much of your time."

"Oh, Mr. Millais," exclaimed Isobel, trying to restrain a vivid blush, "it would be a very great honour. But I am such an ugly duckling. My brother says I have a snub nose!"

"A charming nose," said Mr. Millais, who wore a brown velvet jacket instead of the conventional tail coat. "And if I may say so, I think you bring the breath of a May morning into these gas-lit rooms. Let me bring you an ice, won't you?"

She could hardly answer his question after such a compliment, but the great painter gave her his arm and led her away to the refreshment room, crowded with ladies and gentlemen who were, perhaps, the mothers and fathers of some of my readers, now growing old. Young men, newly down from Oxford, stood about fingering their whiskers and buttoning their white gloves, and blushing, even as Isobel blushed, if they happened to tread on a lady's train or to spill a cup of coffee, as one of them did over a dowager's dress. Others, like Isobel's brother Richard, not yet down from Oxford, looked rather bored in the middle of this "crush", as they called it, complained to each other of the weakness of the claret cup, ate innumerable sandwiches, and made private compacts to steal away at the earliest moment in search of more amusing entertainment at one of those very vulgar music-halls where gilded youth drank beer in the front rows of the stalls and kissed their hands to young women in flesh-coloured tights across the footlights.

X

It was on one of these evenings that Isobel met a young man for whom she had been waiting since girlhood, the Unknown Lover who had come vaguely into her dreams, the Ideal Knight who had won her favours in the world of Romance, the Youngest Son of the fairy tales which Miss Venables had read aloud to her before she could read herself.

Richard was in one of his rebellious moods, and announced his intention of going off to the Alhambra for an hour with two men he knew.

"But, Richard," protested Isobel, "how am I going to get home if you come back late? You know Papa forbids me to drive home without your escort."

"Oh, Arthur will take you home in case I'm a bit late—which I shan't be."

"Papa would think that *most* improper," said Isobel. "Arthur is not the same thing as a brother, after all! You know Papa insists upon your accompanying me unless I am chaperoned by Mamma or some other lady. In any case I dare not let out that you've been at a music-hall, unless you're willing to suffer parental wrath of the most serious kind."

"Oh, for heaven's sake don't let that out," said Richard nervously. "The Pater regards a music-hall as a sink of iniquity. I'm sorry I told you."

"I won't blab," said Isobel, "but you *must* promise to be back in time to drive home with me before eleven."

"Oh, rather!" said Richard carelessly. He winked at a young man waiting for him by the folding doors, and together they departed for more riotous amusement.

It was then that Arthur Mannington came up with a young man who fingered his tie rather nervously and pressed back a frayed cuff so that it would not show the deplorable result of a cheap laundry.

"Oh, Isobel," said Arthur in his easy, elegant way, "I want to introduce my friend Henry Verney. He writes for the London

papers. Dramatic criticism, reviews of books, newspaper paragraphs on all sorts of subjects. Marvellous, don't you think? He has an article this week in *Household Words*."

"They haven't paid for it yet," said the young man, laughing at this introduction, and glancing shyly at Isobel Ingleby.

"How thrilling!" exclaimed Isobel. "Do you call yourself a journalist, Mr. Verney? It's the first time I've ever met one."

"We don't come to places like this as a rule," he answered. "Besides, I'm only beginning, you know. I'm what we call a free-lance."

"How romantic that sounds!" said Isobel. "A knight errant in search of Truth and Beauty."

Mr. Henry Verney, whom afterwards she called Harry, laughed again uneasily, because of his shyness under the bright glance of Isobel, who looked at him intently, aware that something had touched her heart, like the prick of an arrow from Cupid's bow. It was, perhaps, because he was so very good-looking, with dark hair which was wavy over his forehead, and brown, honest-looking eyes with a glint of humour in them, and a straight Norman nose and a finely cut profile with a firm chin. He was taller than Arthur, and a contrast in type to Arthur's fair, blue-eyed, Saxon look. By a glance, too, she could see that he was poor. She had noticed that frayed cuff which he had poked up into his sleeve. His evening clothes looked shiny and worn, almost as though he had hired them—as indeed he had—for this evening at Lady Amersham's. His patent leather boots were cracked over the toes, and he had inked one of the seams before coming out—though she was unaware of that.

This look of poverty—at least of shabby gentility—appealed to her very much, giving him an extra touch of romance in her mind. The well-dressed young men who came to her mother's house and to Lady Amersham's—Richard's Oxford friends—belonged to her own kind of world and had all the advantages of wealth. And most of them were not very interesting or intellectual. But this friend of Arthur's belonged to the other kind of world in which she was most interested because she knew least about it—the world of men and women who had to fight their way against odds, who were the real working people of life, doing the things that matter; writing, painting, struggling to make a career or to climb up to Fame. Those were the people she wanted to know, and here was one of them, a young journalist straight from Bohemia, and looking out of place among the

guests at Lady Amersham's *soirée*, as though he wanted to escape.

He answered her last remark about being a knight errant in search of Truth and Beauty.

"I can't put it as high as that. I am really trying to earn three pounds a week to help with the household bills."

Three pounds a week! Isobel's Papa paid almost as much as that to Mr. Brown, the coachman. She had paid as much as that herself, out of her pin money, for a birthday present to Miss Venables.

Arthur gave some more information about his newly found friend.

"Verney's sister is playing in *Romeo and Juliet* at the Haymarket. We must certainly take a box one evening."

"An actress!" cried Isobel. "How exciting! Could you take us behind the scenes, Mr. Verney? I would give almost anything for a peep behind the scenes."

"It's not very amusing," said Harry Verney. "The stage carpenters shove about bits of scenery and there's a general smell of sawdust and grease-paint. The dressing-rooms are foul little dens without proper ventilation. As a matter of fact, I was born in one."

"Born in one?" exclaimed Isobel incredulously.

"My mother was an actress," he explained simply. "She used to play Dick Whittington in the Christmas pantomimes, and small parts in the provinces. Now she doesn't act any more, and my sister Kate keeps up the family tradition. Personally I've no use for the stage. I was born with an itch for writing."

"*Cacoethes scribendi*," said Arthur hurriedly, lest Isobel's ears should be offended by that word "itch". He always imagined that she was much more sensitive to occasional coarseness than she really was.

"Do tell me some more," said Isobel. "I'm so glad to know things about other people's lives—I mean people who struggle and strive to do interesting things without having everything made easy for them because they are rich or highly born."

"I'm afraid I'll have to leave you," said Arthur. "My mother is beckoning me. I'll be back again as soon as I can get away."

But he did not come back for half an hour, and in that time Isobel seemed to have known Harry Verney for quite a long period.

"How did Arthur get to know you, Mr. Verney?" she asked.

"He read something of mine in the *Gentleman's Magazine*,

and wrote to me about it. Then he called one day, and we seemed to get on rather well, although the slavey announced him as 'a swell in a pot hat' when she called out to my mother [who was upstairs with a headache.]

"A swell in a pot hat." Isobel laughed at this description of Arthur Mannington, so afraid of being thought a snob, and so liberal in his ideas.

"Arthur is an idealist," she told the young man, who avoided her eyes because of shyness in his own. "One day he will be one of the leaders of England. He's a Liberal, you know, much to my Papa's annoyance. We are Tories, of course. At least I have to pretend to be, though really I am very sorry for the Poor, and all that."

Harry Verney smiled at her, and their eyes met for a moment.

"Why do you say 'Tories of course'? Is it an hereditary complaint?"

"My father is Lord Alderton," said Isobel, as though that explained everything, and although Harry Verney was not much of a politician at the time, being more interested in art and letters, he seemed to grasp the significance of this fact.

"Oh," he said, as though abashed and crestfallen at the information. He had seen Lord Alderton's name in columns of *The Times*, defending the moral effect of public executions, protesting against the abolition of transportation to convict settlements, pleading for renewed severity of the penal laws against Fenians, reproving Mr. Disraeli, even, for his extension of the Franchise, and denouncing the proposals for compulsory education.

"Why do you say 'Oh' in such a disapproving way?" asked Isobel, laughing at the young man's tone of voice.

"I hate to think you are the daughter of a lord," said Harry Verney.

"It's not my fault!" exclaimed Isobel. "And I'm perfectly human for all that! Do you object to knowing the daughter of a nobleman? Isn't that rather snobbish of you?"

That last question astonished him, it seemed, by the way he raised his eyebrows.

He stammered slightly as he answered.

"I mean I—I don't move in your set. All this is outside my line. I came here just to see what it looked like. My journalistic instinct, you know. But I don't belong here."

"And what do you think of us?" asked Isobel, teasing him

a little. "Do we seem very alarming? Are we more unpleasant than you expected?"

Harry Verney glanced round the rooms, crowded with elegant men and women.

"It's like a stage play," he remarked. "Unreal. Presently I shall go home to a little house in Chelsea and read a book in an armchair with a rickety leg and the horsehair stuffing showing through the cover. Then my sister Kate will come back from the theatre and make herself some cocoa over the dining-room fire."

"How charming!" said Isobel. "I wish I could see you in that little house, and help your sister to make the cocoa."

Harry Verney looked at her doubtfully.

"If you would like to call one day," he suggested with a touch of irony, "you might see how the Poor live. The slavey will probably wear a dirty apron and announce you as a young person in pink or whatever you may happen to wear. If you came at tea-time I could toast some crumpets for you. We don't keep a butler, you know, or flunkeys in powdered wigs."

"Who wants flunkeys in powdered wigs?" asked Isobel. "Not that I have any objection to them," she added hurriedly, remembering her friendship with Robert, her favourite footman. "May I really come one day?" she asked. "Would your mother think me a nuisance if I called?"

"My mother is very goodnatured," said Harry Verney, with a secret smile in his eyes. "But she is rather alarming to people who don't know her very well. She says exactly what she thinks about almost everything."

"But how wonderful!" cried Isobel.

"Yes," said Harry Verney. "But very embarrassing now and then."

They talked about books for a time—Mr. Verney shared her enthusiasm for Dickens—and then Arthur came back, annoyed at having been obliged to make himself civil to an ancient dowager who needed nourishment like Mr. Tennyson. It was eleven o'clock. Isobel became anxious about the return of Richard, knowing that her father would be angry if she came back late, and still more angry—horrified, indeed—if she returned without her brother's protection. Her father had laid it down as an absolute rule that she must never go about alone in London, even in one of the family broughams with a footman on the box.

"Arthur," said Isobel anxiously, "what am I going to do about it? It's really very naughty of Richard."

Arthur rose to the occasion nobly. Like Isobel's Papa, he

would have been aghast at the idea of a young lady of Isobel's age and innocence driving alone from St. James's Square to Belgrave Square unchaperoned and unprotected. His sense of chivalry revolted against such an idea. Nor did it occur to him for a moment that he could go with Isobel himself. Liberal as he was in politics and literary taste, he had an instinctive and traditional belief in the proprieties of his time which forbade a young man and woman to go about alone together lest scandal should result.

He was indeed slightly embarrassed when Isobel suggested that he should take her back to Belgrave Square if he could leave his mother's guests for half an hour.

"Oh, I don't think that would do. People might talk, you know. I will provide a respectable female to accompany you."

He provided one of his mother's maids, and, before leaving with her, Isobel said good-bye to Mr. Harry Verney, who had listened to this conversation about chaperons with a hidden humour in his brown eyes.

"Good-bye, Sir Knight of the Free Lance. Will you let me meet your mother and sister one day—unless they would hate me to call on them?"

"I don't think they would hate you," he answered quietly.

He hesitated for a moment while he held her hand.

"I am sure they would fall in love with you," he added, with a kind of homage in his eyes for a girl who knew that he thought her beautiful. It was impossible not to know, because his eyes—those brown, fawnlike eyes—told her so very plainly, so that she felt herself blushing, with a slight flutter at the heart where her stays were tight. . . .

Upon arriving home she slipped past the footmen after wishing them good-night. Her father and mother had not yet returned from a dinner-party at Lord Derby's, so that there was no need of any explanation about Richard's carelessness. It was really very shameful of him to stay out all that time at some low music-hall. . . .

She was dreaming, she tells me, about a young knight with brown eyes and wavy hair who drove through London on the top of a hansom cab, carrying a long quill pen, pointed like a lance—"a most ridiculous dream, my dear, which I remember as though it happened yesterday!"—when she was awakened by someone trying to open her bedroom window.

She sat up in bed and cried out, "Who is there?"

The sash of her bedroom window was lifted up and—it was

already daylight—she saw a man's leg come over the sill. It was Richard's leg, as she saw when she was about to scream. The whole of Richard came through the window and stood with his back to the light of a London dawn. It was a very battered Richard. The tall hat at the back of his head was crushed like a concertina. One side of his collar had become unfastened. His evening clothes were splashed with mud, and there was a rent above his right knee. He looked very pale and ill.

"Richard!" cried Isobel. "What on earth is the matter? How did you get up here? Where have you been all night?"

He grinned at her, in spite of looking so haggard and unwell.

"I'm not a bad climber," he said. "I shinned up one of the columns, hoisted myself over the balcony, swarmed up a drain-pipe, and here I am. I was rather afraid I might be spotted by a Bobby. I was even more afraid that I might awaken the Pater, who is a light sleeper."

"But, Richard," cried Isobel, "what have you been doing? You look awful. Have you been out all night?"

"A most tremendous spree," he told her excitedly. "I've been to see a public hanging outside Newgate. I don't mind telling you I was as sick as a dog when the fellow was jerked off."

He was sick again in Isobel's basin, although I hate to tell such a thing about a young gentleman of the Victorian era. It was Isobel who told me.

She told me something else, which seems unbelievable because of the long arm of coincidence which happens sometimes in real life and more often in fiction, always straining one's sense of credulity.

The fellow who was "jerked off" outside Newgate Prison was a gipsy named Zachary Lee, condemned for killing a policeman on Mitcham Common when he was arrested for shooting a game-keeper a month or two before. Once when Isobel was a little girl this young gipsy had kissed her cheek in a brotherly way after she had brought him food in her father's copse. She had given him a cheap little ring for a keepsake, but it hadn't brought him luck.

She read the name next morning in *The Times*, which gave an account of the hanging and in a leading article deplored the disgraceful scenes which had happened outside Newgate—vast crowds of roughs, shrieking women, the hoarse laughter of brutal men, young boys and girls singing ribald songs through the night while they waited for the grim scene at dawn, pick-pockets and cutpurses busy in the mob, which, to the disgrace

of England, contained gentlemen of good education from the Universities, and well-dressed women of the immoral class.

Isobel gave a cry over the breakfast-table when she read that name Zachary Lee.

"What is the matter, my dear?" asked his lordship. "Aren't you well? Both you and Richard look rather poorly this morning."

"It is nothing, Papa," said Isobel. "Just a little spasm."

"I wish you would not go to Lady Amersham's receptions so much," remarked his lordship. "She invites all kinds of queer fish. The aristocracy is losing its dignity and pride. We open our doors to the riff-raff."

"Excuse me, Papa," said Isobel.

She left the table hurriedly. On her left cheek she felt a kind of burn. It was where she had been kissed by a gipsy boy who had been hanged before a mob at Newgate. Strange that a lady should still be living with that memory in her mind!

XI

HARRY VERNEY lived with his mother and sister, as he told a high-born lady, in Royal Avenue, Chelsea. It sounds rather grand, especially as it turns out of the King's Road, but as far as I know its most intimate connection with royalty was that King Charles II once drove that way with naughty Nell Gwynne, who had a good heart, poor dear, whatever her wantonness, and goaded, it is said, His Majesty into building the Royal Hospital for old soldiers, where it still stands in its spacious gardens, the most beautiful building of its period still left in London.

Royal Avenue was not at all grand, and hardly more than shabby genteel at the time when Isobel Ingleby made her first call on Mrs. Verney. Indeed, its double row of little houses on each side of a gravel walk—they are now being snapped up and repainted by smart young people who keep two-seater cars in neighbouring garages—were not quite respectable. It was suspected by Harry Verney and his sister Kate that the pretty woman living next door was the mistress of a middle-aged man who drove up in a hansom three times a week. He wore a pot hat, a double-breasted coat, and a white waistcoat, from which dangled some heavy gold seals.

"I wouldn't be the mistress of an old rip like that," remarked Kate, who was very free in her way of speech, not having had the strict upbringing of Isobel Ingleby.

"I hope you wouldn't be the mistress of anyone," answered Harry severely, upon which Kate made a face like Queen Victoria and said, "Be good, sweet child, and let who will be clever."

At Number 12 there was an elderly gentleman who had taken to drink. They knew he had taken to drink because of the innumerable bottles collected by the rag-and-bone man who came down the street twice a week crying out, "Any rags and bones? Any bottles?" Alice, who was Mrs. Verney's "slavey" and inquisitive about the neighbours, said that old Briggs at Number 12 drank eight bottles of whisky a week "regular" and twelve if he felt thirsty. As children Harry and Kate used to

watch him come down Royal Avenue holding on to the railings, colliding heavily with the letter-box, or embracing the lamp-post as though he loved it.

"That old scamp will break his neck as sure as fate," said Mrs. Verney more than once. "And a jolly good job, too," she added, although she was good-hearted and compassionate. "He's a disgrace to the Avenue and no good to himself."

The woman in Number 9 let lodgings to single gentlemen, who were mostly in the City and hurried off after breakfast wiping the morning egg from their moustaches to board the omnibus to the Bank which came down the King's Road. But on the top floor was a lodger who was studying law in the Temple and was a good-looking young man for whom Kate had a secret admiration, among many other good-looking young men who inspired her with the same sentiment. He gave late parties to fellow students of the Middle Temple, and Harry, trying to write an article for *Household Words*, groaned at the choruses which came forth from the open window of Number 9. They were particularly fond of such ditties as "Champagne Charlie" and "Villikins and his Dinah". Kate, who had the front bedroom, used to lean out of window with her elbows on the sill, listening to these ribald songs with great interest and enjoyment. The rest of Royal Avenue was inhabited by elderly ladies in reduced circumstances, and by an Irish family, suspected by their neighbours of being Fenians, with four boys and three girls, who were always deplorably shabby—the boys were almost ragged sometimes—but very haughty towards the other young people, including Harry and Kate, at whom they stared with hatred and disdain until, later, they established friendly relations. Their father was descended from the Kings of Ireland, it seemed, according to Eileen O'Brien, who came to tea with Kate. They had once lived in a castle in County Cork, almost as big as Windsor Castle according to Michael, the eldest son. Now their father was sub-editor of a paper called the *Morning Chronicle* and worked mostly at night. "Of course," said Michael O'Brien, "we're as poor as blazes, but when Ireland gets her freedom the O'Briens will be restored to their former power and fortune."

"Don't you believe it!" said Kate hotly—she was only a child at the time. "Ireland will go to the dogs if England don't rule it. Besides, Ireland has belonged to England for hundreds of years. We're not going to let go of it because of a lot of dirty Fenians who kill people behind hedges."

Michael O'Brien, aged twelve in those early days, cried out

to Jesus and Mary, being of the Papist religion, and flung himself upon Kate with murderous intent. It was Alice, the slavey, who came to the rescue and Mrs. Verney who poured oil on the troubled waters.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Kate darling. Don't you know your own mother has Irish blood in her and ought to be a good Catholic, if she hadn't been brought up like a gipsy in a circus? The English have always treated the Irish very badly, and that's why I think Mr. Gladstone is a very great statesman, although a bit too pious to my way of thinking, and rather a humbug, judging from his speeches. Now kiss Michael and say you're sorry for insulting the Irish."

"Drat the Irish," said Kate, who was very obstinate. But, reluctantly, she kissed Michael and gave him a threepenny-bit with a hole in it as a peace offering.

It was the first time that Harry and Kate knew they had Irish blood in their veins, and they kept it as a dark secret from their English friends because of a social and political prejudice due to the Fenian scare at this time, when Members of Parliament were guarded by detectives lest they should be murdered between one lamp-post and another, although no such thing had ever happened.

Kate had been born three years before her arrival in Royal Avenue, and remembered nothing earlier than that; but Harry, two years older than his sister, had dim and distant memories of another life, when he crawled about the floors of theatrical dressing-rooms into which strange people came dressed as fairies and red devils and princes. He could remember perfectly distinctly the taste of a grease-paint which he had sucked until he was sick. He could remember a friendly man who clothed himself in the skin of a beast and carried a wolf's head under his arm, until a moment came when he put it on and spoke through its jaws to a tiny boy who had no fear of him. He could remember his mother telling him fairy tales or crooning old songs to him before she ran away somewhere dressed as Little Red Riding Hood or Cinderella, and then came back for a few minutes to kiss him and tell him to go to sleep before she disappeared again.

He could remember journeys in coaches when he lay in his mother's arms, and journeys in trains when his mother's friends were talking and laughing, or playing cards on newspapers spread over their knees. He could remember in a dreamlike way being hoisted on to the shoulders of that man with the

wolf's head and carried through smoky streets in rain and snow, and old English towns with timbered houses, until he was put to bed in unknown rooms, small, dimly lit, and dirty, with a smell of bugs which he came to know and never forgot. He was only four years old at the time, according to Isobel Ingleby's reckoning when he told her these things.

Then there was a curious scene which he remembered—he was certain he remembered it—which must have happened shortly after their arrival in Royal Avenue, when his mother gave up acting. His mother always pooh-poohed this story. "It's just a dream, darling," she said. She laughed at him and pulled his hair when he mentioned it again. She even became a little angry with him when he told it to Kate one day.

"Oh, drat that old story, Harry! Can't you take my word for it it never happened? You just dreamed it, my dear."

All the same he remembered it. He remembered sitting before the window of the front bedroom—the one now used by Kate—looking at the pictures in *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, some of which he had coloured with chalks which tasted rather nice when he wetted them with his lips to make them more vivid. He was colouring a picture of Puss in Boots. The red boots looked fine. His mother was half undressed, with her stays hanging over the back of the iron bedstead, and she was doing her hair, very long and glorious with a glint of copper in it, before the looking-glass on a dressing-table of painted wood. It was absurd to say he could not remember these things.

Suddenly there was a noise in the street below. He put his head over the window-sill and looked out. There was a fine carriage down there outside their own house, with two horses, and a coachman in a white wig, and a footman in a livery with gold epaulettes. The footman jumped down and boxed the ears of a small boy who had put his fingers to his nose at him and shouted, "Yah, look at 'im! Guy Fox Guy! Stick 'im in the eye!" Then the footman opened the carriage door and a handsome gentleman stepped on to the pavement and shook a gold-knobbed stick at a group of gutter urchins who were crowding round.

"Is this the house, James?" he asked.

"Yes, my lord," said the footman.

It was absurd to think that Harry could have dreamed all that.

Harry's mother was looking out of window and gave a cry of alarm or dismay, or perhaps of pleasure. Harry was not quite

sure of that, except that she cried out and put her hand to her bosom.

She dressed hurriedly and went downstairs and was away a long time, and when she came back to look after Harry her eyes were red, as though she had been crying.

"Surely you remember, Mother?" said Harry when he told this story.

"No, not the first thing about it. A dream, Harry, you silly boy!"

Well, it was no use arguing.

The sketch of an officer in the uniform of the Dragoons at the time of the Crimean War hung over the mantelpiece. It wasn't an oil painting, or even an original drawing. It had been cut out of the *Illustrated London News* and put into a cheap frame, but it was a sacred thing to Harry since his mother let him know that this was the portrait of his dead father. He had been killed, she told him, by the first shot in the Crimean War.

"Out he went," she said, "and shoot-bang-pop! your poor father was killed. Well, a hero's death, Harry!"

"How frightful for you, Mother!" said Harry, putting his arms about her.

"Terrible, Harry. I was acting in Cinderella at the time. I nearly cried my eyes out. Mr. Gandy, the stage manager, said, 'For God's sake dry those eyes, child. They're making a mess of your grease-paint.'"

"Very brutal of him," said Harry, enraged by this anecdote.

"Well, the public comes first," said his mother. "That's the first duty of an actress. Death, fire, or twins, she has to smile across the footlights. It needs all one's courage sometimes."

"Tell me more about my father," said Harry, not then only but at other times. It was strange how little his mother had to tell him about her husband. He was a handsome fellow. He had called for her one night at the stage door. They had been married—well—somewhere or other! She couldn't remember the name of the blessed town, as she was always travelling. Yes, he had treated her kindly. A fine type of man and a great gentleman. A soldier to his finger-tips. Then he was ordered off to the war and killed like that. Of course for a time she was heartbroken.

"But how is it I can't remember him?" asked Harry in a puzzled way. "I can remember sucking the grease-paint, and the man with the wolf's head——"

"Your uncle Jim," said his mother.

"But I can't remember my father anywhere."

Mrs. Verney laughed at him.

"Of course not, Harry. You don't think your father would travel round with a theatrical company? Why, he was an officer, stationed at Aldershot and other places. The Curragh in Ireland. And Chelsea Barracks, I daresay."

"But surely it was mean of him to let you go on acting and dragging two babies round like that?"

"Not at all!" said Mrs. Verney, laughing again. "He was a poor young man at the time with nothing but his pay."

"Then who pays you that four hundred a year?" asked Harry. "If he was so poor as all that——"

"Now mind your own business, my boy," said Mrs. Verney sharply. "Really, Harry, why should you want to poke your nose into my private affairs?"

"It's only because I want to know all about my father."

"Well, I've told you all about him. He had the loveliest whiskers you ever saw, and eyes just like yours, darling. Now let's talk about something else."

XII

HARRY did not go to school until he was nearly eleven, being rather delicate as a small boy. But he picked out his letters by the time he was four or five, and could read perfectly by the age of seven, when he became absorbed in *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, *Robinson Crusoe*, followed later by the works of Jules Verne, G. P. R. James, and Walter Scott. Fortunately his mother was also a great reader of novels, which she borrowed, mostly in three-volume form, from Mudie's Library in the Brompton Road.

Many of them were not to the taste of her small son, being love romances of modern life in which innocent young women of humble birth, generally governesses in rich families, fell desperately in love with young noblemen and suffered agonies of the heart—due in most cases to misunderstandings and pilloined letters—before they were led to the altar under crossed swords. But Harry was always enchanted to go with his mother to Mudie's in this quest of romance, holding her hand tight, with the silken flounces of her crinoline scraping against his bare legs—bare between his knickers and socks—and proud on the homeward journey to carry these three precious volumes. Sometimes they refreshed themselves on this adventure by a visit to a bun shop in Knightsbridge, where Harry was almost buried between the spreading flounces of his mother and other ladies who sat at little tables eating cream buns and sipping glasses of port wine.

Some of them were very pretty ladies who smiled at him as he peeped out at them with grave observant eyes, but not one was ever so pretty, he thought, as his own mother, who, of course, was the prettiest woman in the world because of her wonderful hair with a glint of gold in it and her laughing eyes and roselike complexion. Gentlemen turned to look back at her as they walked down the Brompton Road or Sloane Street on their way back to Royal Avenue. One of them now and then even turned and followed her, and then she became a little

flustered and asked Harry to look back and see if "Mr. Impudence" was still on the trail.

"Yes, he's still following us, Mother. He's wearing an eye-glass. I think he wants to talk to us."

"If he does he'll get a flea in his ear, I can tell you. It's shameful to think a woman can't walk about London without being ogled by well-dressed villains."

"It's because you're so pretty, Mother," said Harry more than once. "Gentlemen want to make friends with you."

After a remark like that Mrs. Verney laughed and blushed into the little muff she carried.

"Harry, you'll be the death of me! Well, I'm glad you think your mother isn't as ugly as sin."

She had a habit of taking off her crinoline and stays when she was at home, and sitting in her bodice and petticoat with bare arms if the weather was warm, perhaps because she had been an actress and could not forget the habits of the dressing-rooms. And she was fond of sweets and always had a little paper bag of sugared almonds or toffee which she shared with Harry and Kate, sucking them while she read out loud sometimes. She read in a wonderful way, acting all the parts and giving different voices to all the characters, so that when she read out Shakespeare's plays it was like going to the theatre, and Harry used to sit spellbound for an hour or more, listening to the speeches of Romeo and Juliet and Hamlet and Rosalind, who became very real to him. She was also good at Dickens, especially when she came to the comic characters, so that Harry could hardly bear it, and laughed so much over Sairey Gamp and Mr. Stiggins and Sam Weller that he rolled on the floor and became almost hysterical with laughter, to the alarm of his mother.

"Harry, you little goose! Don't get so excited! If you laugh so much I shall have to stop reading to you."

"Oh, go on, Mother, please! Only don't do Sairey Gamp quite so like her. When you put on that voice I want to scream."

"*'Put it on the mantelpiece, my dear, and I'll take some when I feel so disposed'*," read Harry's mother, making a face like an old charwoman who came to Royal Avenue to clean the steps.

"Oh!" cried Harry. "Oh! It's too frightfully funny!"

After that he went to a day school in the King's Road, kept by Mr. Widgery, M.A., and by Mrs. Widgery, who instructed the smaller boys and her own husband. He was no disciplinarian, being a mild little man, devoted to the classics and with a passion

for the eighteenth-century novelists like Fielding and Smollett which he hid from Victorian schoolboys. He went in terror of the elder boys, who made his life intolerable by riotous contempt and the most outrageous jokes. They lighted crackers under his chair, let loose noxious gases in the class-room, scrawled caricatures of him on the blackboard, played games behind their desks, and almost reduced him to tears by their pandemonium until Mrs. Widgery appeared, large, menacing, and muscular, to restore order by cuffing the ringleaders and confiscating their most precious possessions, such as knives, squirts, marbles and popguns. It seems incredible that boys educated in such a fashion should have made their way in the world with distinction, yet some of Harry's schoolfellows became famous in after life as writers and artists and lawyers.

Harry himself learnt nothing at Mr. Widgery's, where he suffered moral torture among this crowd of disorderly young ruffians. His real education, apart from his private reading, began when he became a student at King's College in the Strand, and attended lectures on English literature, political economy, Greek and Roman history, French, German, and Latin.

He was one of a crowd of young men—boys, rather, of fifteen to sixteen—who found a cheap substitute for Oxford and Cambridge in this new development of university education in London. They were the sons of professional men, civil servants, and small shopkeepers, who could not afford to send their boys to the older universities once founded for poor scholars but now the exclusive privilege of the Nobility and Gentry. The King's College students were not members of the wealthy class, and some of them were so poor—as Harry came to know—that they starved themselves, or at least went hungry, in order to buy the books with which they fed their minds. During the luncheon hour they wandered forth into Holywell Street and Wych Street—existing no longer—where they eased the gnawing of empty stomachs by buying a pennyworth of figs or a baked potato from costers' barrows, and browsed over old books and prints in the second-hand shops which were crowded in those narrow alleys. Or they went further afield into the purlieus of Soho, not yet thronged by bright young things lunching and dining in expensive restaurants, but were the haunt of political refugees from France, and Spain, and Italy, and Russia, and many other countries where revolution was a habit or where oppression was a tyranny.

Harry stared into the faces of these people, haggard, pale,

framed in lank hair, wearing weather-stained cloaks and black hats, shabby, underfed, brooding. Some of them were plotting in dark little rooms for the overthrow of Czardom, for the freedom of Ireland, for Carlist risings in Spain, for a Republic in France, for the liberation of Poland, for the destruction of Capital, for universal anarchy, for the dream of some Utopia which would come at last to ease the endless martyrdom of man. Standing by the bookstalls in Holywell Street, turning over the pages of some old tome, he rubbed shoulders with men in whose minds were thoughts which one day would destroy Empires and hurl thrones into an abyss of anarchy and let loose the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse for their ride across the fields of death. One of them was an old gentleman with a woolly beard, wearing mittens on his wrists, and a red muffler round his neck over a rusty frock coat and baggy trousers. He asked for a cheap copy of John Stuart Mill's *Principles of Political Economy* while Harry was glancing at some prints of the French Revolution.

"What name, sir?" asked the bookstall boy—a youth with a pen behind his ear and an acid tablet in his left cheek.

"Marx," said the old gentleman, with a strong foreign accent. "Karl Marx. I will call for it to-morrow."

His name meant nothing to Harry Verney. It was before the time of Lenin and a new form of slavery so humorously called the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.

XIII

DURING these years between sixteen and twenty Harry was a serious student and annoyed his mother sometimes by being so much absorbed in his work.

"Oh, Harry, for goodness' sake take your nose out of those wretched books! You'll make yourself ill with so much study. Now put them away and be sociable for once. Do you think we can get into the pit at the Haymarket? They're playing *Caste* by Mr. Robertson. Or would you like to take me to Ranelagh Gardens? It's a bit rowdy, but it always amuses me."

He took her to Ranelagh Gardens, shocked sometimes because his mother enjoyed the side-shows, which were rather vulgar, and could not resist the temptation of having her hand told by a palmist or her silhouette cut in black paper by an artist who wore a velvet mask.

"It's heavenly, isn't it, Harry?" she would say when the weather was fine and she strolled about with him down winding paths with fairy lights strung between the bushes, while a band played *La Traviata* or *Les Cloches de Corneville*.

"It's a good thing I have a tall young man to look after me," she said on one of these evenings. "Goodness knows what would happen if I came here alone! There are a lot of fast hussies about, Harry. I'm afraid we're not in a very respectable place, my dear."

Harry was quite certain they were not in a respectable place. Owing to his London upbringing and his conversations with precocious boys at Mr. Widgery's, he had a knowledge of life in some of its uglier aspects which he never discussed with his mother or sister. He was well aware that the young women who passed him with leering eyes and sometimes caught hold of his arm—even when he was walking with his mother—were not of the very strictest virtue. Some of them were elegantly dressed and looked charming in their flounced hoops and laced bodices, with little hats perched on their hair done into a *chignon* according to the latest style. But for the bright patches of colour on their

cheeks and lips, they might have been the daughters of Duchesses, at least in the eyes of Harry, who was not acquainted at that time with the daughters of Duchesses. But others, and most of them, perhaps, were in shabby imitations of fashion, and their finery was cheap and frayed. Their laughter was shrill and false. Sometimes under their paint were haggard faces and anxious lines, and the eyes which ogled Harry as he passed had a desperate hungry look behind their glitter.

The young men who walked about in groups with silver-knobbed canes stared at these ladies of Ranelagh with smiling and insolent appraisal of their charms, or their lack of charm. Old gentlemen with dyed whiskers ogled them through monocles, and invited them to strawberries and cream in the refreshment tents where these old satyrs whispered to those London mænads.

Down some of the shady paths there were little squeals of mirth from girls belonging to a different class—shop girls and servant girls—pursued by amorous young men, while in the shadow of some of the bushes young couples stood closely embraced with little murmurs and endearments which made young Harry shy when he passed with his mother, who, as he saw, smiled through her veil.

One evening when she went into one of the side-shows to see a panorama of the Destruction of Jerusalem, Harry waited outside to get some fresh air after long hours of study, and a young woman grabbed him by the arm and leaned her head against his shoulder.

"Pretty boy!" she said. "Won't you come home with me and let me teach you how nicely I can love?"

Harry shrugged her off angrily.

"I'm not that sort," he said.

For a moment she laughed in a very shrill high voice, but then she became angry and spoke to him like a spitfire.

"Oh, you're not that sort, eh? Think yourself a noble young fellow, with a high and mighty opinion of yourself, eh? Well, my little boy, one of these days you'll know better. It's the prigs who fall lowest in the end. I suppose you despise me because I'm a bad girl? It was a dirty little prig like you who made me what I am. A young gentleman from Oxford, who talked as la-di-da as you do."

"Please go away," said Harry angrily. "My mother is coming out. Can't you behave decently?"

His mother came out of the side-show and overheard his

words as the girl slunk off with another laugh, hard and angry and shrill.

For a moment Mrs. Verney was silent. Then she put her hand on his arm and spoke more seriously than usual.

"I'm glad you're a good boy, Harry. But don't be too hard on these poor little creatures. It's the men who ought to take the blame. And life isn't easy for girls like that. It isn't easy for any girl who has to earn her living. I found that out when I was acting."

Harry was silent. He hated talking to his mother about things like that. There were subjects one could not discuss with women without hideous embarrassment, and this was one of them, although every time he went to Ranelagh the truth of its vulgarity and its vice stared out at them. It was best, he thought, to ignore it, to pretend it wasn't there, turn one's head away from sinister aspects of Life while the band played the merry music of *Les Cloches de Corneville* and the fairy lights twinkled in the bushes.

But that evening he abused the place bitterly.

"I don't think you ought to come here, Mother. It's utterly vile."

"Oh no," said Mrs. Verney. "It's always very amusing, and one does see a bit of life, Harry!"

XIV

KATE did not come to these Ranelagh evenings with them because at that time she was boarding at Mr. Jenkins's Academy for Young Ladies in Belsize Park, much to her own annoyance.

"I can't think why you want me to stay at such a place," she told her mother. "It's ridiculous. All the girls are milk-sops, except one or two. Mr. Jenkins is an old woman. Mrs. Jenkins is positively absurd. The other mistresses are enough to make a cat laugh. Why should I try to learn Astronomy and Geology and the Principles of Sound, Light, and Heat, and Parsing—good heavens, that Parsing!—when I've made up my mind to go on the stage?"

"I'm sure it's good for you, darling," said Mrs. Verney soothingly.

Kate's wholesale condemnation of Mr. Jenkins's Academy or Young Ladies was unjust. Mr. Jenkins was a very remarkable man, in advance of his times. With better opportunities, free from the dreadful necessity of paying his weekly bills by teaching unruly and gluttonous young women, he might have been a scientist of some note. Unlike other schoolmasters of his time, and especially those responsible for the education of Victorian girlhood, he endeavoured to teach them something about the world in which they lived, and to give them a few glimpses behind the veil of its mysteries. He discoursed to them on the story of the rocks, as far as he knew it, from Lyell's *Geology*. He showed them fossils and made them draw them. He conducted simple experiments in chemistry, to their great alarm and horror because of the noxious smells inevitable in that science.

He tried to interest them in the planets and stars above their heads, and did succeed in making some young ladies understand that the earth moved round the sun; though Kate was one of those who disbelieved it in spite of all he said to the contrary and many diagrams on the blackboard. Some parents demurred

very strongly at these subsidiary subjects, which they believed were calculated to undermine the faith of Christian young gentlewomen by making them believe in the detestable theories of Charles Darwin and Mr. Huxley ; who, if all they heard was true, maintained that men were descended from monkeys and that the age of the earth was older than the figures most clearly stated in the revised version of the Old Testament.

It was perhaps for that reason that the Academy for Young Ladies in Belsize Park went into bankruptcy some time after Kate had left.

Yet the scientific interests of Mr. Jenkins did not interfere unduly with the other subjects essential to the education of Victorian girlhood. From a young man who had passed through the Royal Academy Schools they learnt to paint flowers in water-colours and to draw innumerable cubes, cones, hexagons, and other geometrical forms in crayon delicately shaded. Indeed, some of them went as far as drawing plaster hands and feet and the head of Moses with a remarkably long and curly beard. From a German pianist who had studied in Munich and had once been the Kapell Meister to the Court of Saxony, they learnt to play on the pianoforte—the neighbours in Belsize Park complained bitterly of the incessant scales, arpeggios, and exercises which came rushing out of the open windows of Mr. Jenkins's Academy ; and from a lady who had once sung in Grand Opera on the same platform as Jenny Lind, the Swedish Nightingale, they learnt to sing drawing-room ballads. "Scenes that are Brightest" clashed with "I Dreamt that I Dwelt in Marble Halls" and "What are the Wild Waves Saying ?" when City gentlemen started for their offices after an early breakfast.

Several times during the season the young ladies who showed musical ability, and had earned high marks for good conduct, were taken by Mrs. Jenkins to the "Monday Pops", as those Popular Concerts were called, at St. James's Hall, where they listened in rapture to some of the greatest musicians in the world ; including the great violinist Joachim, whose magnificent head, so grave and massive, reminded them of the bust of Beethoven over the mantelpiece of their own music-room. Mr. Watts, the artist, was painting his portrait.

Mrs. Jenkins had been a beauty in her time and still had a rich and voluptuous grace, which she exhibited when she gave her exercises in calisthenics, or demonstrated to girls, who nearly burst themselves with suppressed giggles, the art of crossing a polished floor, opening a door while facing the room, leaving a

room with elegance and dignity, and entering with sprightliness and charm.

It is a pity, but not surprising, that in moments of despondency and overwrought nerves she took to drinking gin, which she concealed with the aid of cloves and peppermints under the plea of headaches and a weak heart.

The control of thirty or forty girls, most of whom were boarders, might have worn out the nerves of the most strong-minded lady, especially when the standard of conduct expected from Victorian maidenhood was higher than human nature could possibly attain without severe repression of high spirits. From Kate's account to her brother Harry, and afterwards to Isobel Ingleby, it seems that Victorian young ladies of the Middle Class, to which they belonged with one or two exceptions—such as poor Jenny Vetch, the daughter of a publican at Islington—were not so innocent or so entirely without guile as they are represented in history.

Unbeknown to their parents, they had flirtations with young men. While walking out in crocodile formation, looking extremely virtuous, one or two naughty and wanton wenches actually slipped amorous notes into the hands of the head boys from a neighbouring Academy for Young Gentlemen under the very nose of Miss Blight, one of the assistant mistresses, who was utterly unaware of this horrible breach of decorum and propriety. Kate and her chief friend, Alice Calthrop, were the leaders of rebellion, the instigators of mischief, and the naughtiest of the bad set.

It was Kate Verney who tied up a Bryant and May's match-box in a little parcel, attached it to a reel of cotton, and flung it forth from the dormitory window to the pavement below, holding on to the reel. An old lady, taking her morning walk from a house near by, observed the little parcel lying there so innocently and looking like something rather precious. She stopped and peered at it and then tried to pick it up. But suddenly it jumped away from her, and Kate, in ambush behind a dimity curtain with Alice Calthrop, heard the "Dearie me!" of startled surprise uttered by the ancient dame.

After three attempts she turned hurriedly and went back to her own house, afraid, perhaps, of some diabolical affair, or perturbed lest her reason was forsaking her. Weak with suppressed laughter, Kate lured a stout gentleman by this bait at the end of her reel. He made a grab at it, and then, suspecting the trap when it jerked away from him, looked up

and shook his fist at the open window of the Academy for Young Ladies.

It was astonishing how irresistible was the attraction of that ridiculous little parcel. A young man in a flowered waistcoat was fooled by it, and his top hat fell off when he stooped to it, and his blushes were crimson when he became aware of an agonized giggle from a young lady above who had nearly choked herself by repressing her unseemly mirth.

Mr. Jenkins's attention was directed to these strange happenings as he sat in his study on the ground floor preparing a lesson on Physiology, with charts of the human body which revealed only the most respectable organs suitable for discussion in a class of young ladies. After watching the jerks and jumps of the small parcel on the pavement outside, he summoned Miss Turtle, one of the junior mistresses, and asked her to be so very good as to send Miss Verney to him.

Kate appeared, looking more innocent than even a girl of the Victorian era could possibly be.

"Do you wish to see me, Mr. Jenkins?" she asked, with her head drooping demurely, and her hands clasped in an attitude of maidenly modesty.

Mr. Jenkins glanced at her over his spectacles, and the fact that a smile lengthened his thin lips suggests that, in spite of his anxieties and his duties, a sense of humour still lurked in the soul of this harassed man.

"Miss Kate," he said "I have noticed repeatedly that when any act of indiscipline or disorder happens in this establishment, it may be traced to your leadership or incitement. May I warn you that if I convey this information to Mrs. Jenkins she will take a more serious view of it than I do myself?"

"Oh, Mr. Jenkins!" cried Kate. "How very unjust! I really do not understand what you mean, exactly."

"Kindly think it out," said Mr. Jenkins. "And perhaps as a first result of your meditation you will pull in a parcel attached to a reel of cotton which is disturbing to the passers-by."

"However did you know?" cried Kate, utterly surprised by this omniscience.

"I associated cause and effect, Miss Kate," said Mr. Jenkins dryly. "And now, after these few words, I think you had better get ready for your drawing lesson. Thank you."

"Thank you, Mr. Jenkins."

Kate Verney complained to her mother and Harry that she was saddled with the sins of Alice Calthrop. It was Alice, she

said, who put a white mouse into the bed of Miss Turtle, who nearly screamed the house down. It was Alice who dressed up in a sheet and pretended to be a ghost, so scaring one of the maids that she fainted with fright and had to be restored with sal volatile by Miss Blight. It was Alice Calthrop who smuggled one of her brother's Eton suits into the dormitory, dressed up in it, and sang "Champagne Charlie is my Name", standing on her bed, until Mrs. Jenkins appeared in her dressing-gown with her hair in curl-papers, looking like a picture of Cassandra by Mr. Alma-Tadema. She was unable to discover the cause of this ribald mirth, because Alice had jumped into bed with all her brother's clothes on at the first sound of *Cave!* called out by the other girls.

"Kate Verney," said Mrs. Jenkins in a deep and awful voice, "have I not put you on your honour to refrain from telling funny stories in the dormitory after night prayers?"

"Certainly, Mrs. Jenkins! Why do you ask such a question, Mrs. Jenkins?"

"Because I believe that you have broken a very solemn and sacred promise. Because I do not think that any young lady but yourself would be so inconsiderate as to arouse the whole dormitory with unseemly mirth at this hour of the night."

"Oh, Mrs. Jenkins, if you only knew how utterly unjust you are! I assure you I was trying to go to sleep!"

Alice Calthrop may have been one of the rebels, but it was Kate Verney who scandalized the neighbourhood and endangered the good name of the Academy for Young Ladies by an adventure which can hardly be defended, even by a later code of social behaviour.

She had passed one of those notes to one of the boys who walked out with the Academy for Young Gentlemen not far away in Belsize Park. Indeed, she confessed afterwards that several notes had passed—somewhat formal at first, and merely asking the name of her correspondent, with such questions as *Do you study Geology? Don't you hate walking out at the head of a crocodile?* and *Who is your favourite poet?* The young gentleman who replied—his name was Charlie Birch—shocked even Kate Verney by ending up one of his letters with love and kisses.

"Cheek!" she whispered to Alice Calthrop, to whom she passed this epistle during one of Mr. Jenkins's lectures on the Study of the Heavens.

"Silly little brat!" said Alice Calthrop, beginning to giggle

in her usual way, and then stuffing a handkerchief into her mouth and hiding her head behind the open flap of her writing-desk.

It was all the fault of Charlie Birch, afterwards one of Her Majesty's judges in the High Court of Justice. It is possible that the exchange of glances and notes with Kate Verney had inflamed his young mind with romantic folly. It is possible, on the other hand, that he had bet half a guinea against a new hat that he would invade the Academy for Young Ladies and snatch a kiss from the lips of the prettiest girl, who was certainly Kate Verney.

He was sixteen years of age, and a long-limbed youth. One Sunday evening, after night prayers, he escaped from his own prison-house, ran hatless down a quiet street as far as the Academy for Young Ladies, and climbed over the railings into the laurel bushes.

Upstairs in the dormitory the young ladies were going to bed. Now and again the shadow of bare arms appeared on the window-blinds. It was a girl named Jessie Robinson who became aware of something rattling against the window-panes, as though gravel were being thrown up.

"I say!" she cried in some alarm. "Something's happening to the window! Somebody is trying to attract our attention! Good gracious—it may be a burglar—or a Fenian—or a fire!"

It was Alice Calthrop who opened the window, very quietly.

"Who is there?" she asked in a low voice, for fear of disturbing Mr. and Mrs. Jenkins in their virtuous sleep on the floor below.

A voice came up from the laurel bushes.

"It's Charlie Birch. I want to speak to Miss Kate Verney. I am coming up to the window."

Alice Calthrop whispered back into the room.

"Kate, there's that awful boy after you—Charlie Birch. He's climbing up!"

Kate was in her petticoat and bodice.

"Oh, my eye and Betty Martin!" she said in a low and frightened voice.

Of course she ought not to have gone to the window. That was a most indiscreet step to take. But although alarmed, and conscious of treading on the edge of a moral precipice, the spirit of curiosity and the thrill of drama overwhelmed her discretion and—alas—even her modesty. She tiptoed to the window and leaned out. Behind her stood several of the girls in their nightdresses, excited, horrified, and thrilled.

"Kate!" said a voice not very far below her. "Wait till I get a leg over the window-sill."

Charlie Birch was swarming up a drainpipe with the help of the ivy which grew over the front of the house. The leaves rustled with a dreadful noise. Then an awful thing happened. The window below the dormitory opened suddenly. Mrs. Jenkins's voice rang out sharply.

"Who is there? What is that?"

Charlie Birch lost his nerve and his footing at this challenge. He slithered and dropped with a crash into the laurel bushes.

"Thieves! Burglars!" cried Mrs. Jenkins. A moment later she thrust her bare arm through the bedroom window and swung a police rattle with great violence.

By chance a police constable in his top hat and frock coat was proceeding down Belsize Park, meditating on the latest Fenian outrage which had happened in Hoxton, where a tin canister had exploded outside a police station. He caught Charlie Birch in his arms just as that young gentleman was making a bolt for it.

"Now then, what's all this?"

Charlie Birch was brought into the study of Mr. Jenkins, who descended in his dressing-gown. He was searched for incriminating evidence of felonious intent. Unfortunately he had in his breast pocket the notes he had received from Kate Verney, one of which had the sign of X X X after her signature.

Kate was interrogated that very night by Mrs. Jenkins, and made serious admissions. She was also given away by a young lady named Doris Jones, who behaved with the greatest treachery—according to Kate—although she based her information on a sense of moral principles according to her own view. Kate had gone to the window, she said, in her bodice. She could have forgiven her anything but that. . . .

Kate was expelled from the Academy for Young Ladies and came home to Royal Avenue in tears and a four-wheeled cab. Her tears dried rapidly, and that afternoon Harry heard her singing about the house.

It was three months later, through the friendship of a girl named Kate Terry who came to tea sometimes with her sister Ellen, that she obtained a small part in a play by Mr. Robertson called *Society*, and began her career on the stage.

XV

KATE was at home with her mother when Isobel Ingleby called with Lady Alderton after her meeting with Harry at the reception at Amersham House, St. James's Square, to which he had been taken by his new friend Arthur Mannington. Kate happened to be looking out of her bedroom window when she saw the brougham drive up, and she made a rush for Harry's room, where he was thinking out the plot of a short story destined, he hoped, to be published in *Household Words*.

"Harry, here are some of your grand friends! That girl Isobel Ingleby and a lovely-looking lady who must be her mother."

Harry pushed his papers away and rose from his chair with a look of consternation.

"Well, I can't come down and see them. I'm in a filthy state and my very shabbiest clothes. Where's the Mater?"

"Half undressed and reading a novel by Wilkie Collins."

Harry groaned deeply, as afterwards Kate described the scene to Isobel Ingleby.

"And I expect Alice has a smudge of blacking on her nose and her cap unpinned. Let's pretend there's nobody at home. Tell Alice not to answer the door. For heaven's sake, Kate, don't show yourself behind the window-curtains."

He was in a state of the greatest agitation.

"Pooh!" said Kate, "I'm not afraid of her ladyship and her innocent che-ild! We're as good as they are. Besides, I rather like the look of them. I might get a hint for my new part in Mr. Robertson's play. 'The carriage is at the door, my lady. His lordship is in the rose garden.'"

"Kate, for heaven's sake don't talk so loudly, and such ridiculous nonsense. They might hear you through the open window. Oh Lord, there's someone knocking!"

It was Lady Alderton's footman using the front-door knocker with that *insouciance* which only the footman of exalted folk would be justified in adopting.

Harry's face blanched. He stared at himself in a cracked mirror over the mantelpiece and ran his fingers through his disorderly hair.

"Knock, knock, knock!" said Kate in a solemn and awful voice, quoting from the Porter in *Macbeth*. "Who's here, i' the name of Beelzebub?"

"Miss Kate!" cried a shrill and plaintive voice from the basement. "Miss Kate! Open the door for me, there's a dear! I'm scrubbing the kitchen floor to keep the beetles back!"

"God help us!" said Harry, as though stricken by a mortal blow.

Kate laughed and dashed downstairs. She was vastly amused by the drama of this visit from the grand people of whom Harry had given her some description. She had no self-consciousness like her brother, who was absurdly sensitive now and then and afraid of what people might think of them. What did it matter what people thought? . . .

The footman had retired to the carriage door. On the front steps stood a very pretty girl about her own age in a ravishing costume of blue silk with a short jacket of ermine trimmed with squirrel's fur, and a tiny hat perched on her chignon.

"Good afternoon," said Kate in a friendly way.

Isobel Ingleby smiled at her and spoke rather nervously.

"My mother and I are leaving cards. We had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Verney at Lady Amersham's. We should be so delighted if Mrs. Verney would condescend to return our call."

All this was so very formal that Kate Verney could not refrain from answering with a half-resisted laugh.

"I'm sure it's very kind of you! Won't you come in and see Mother? I don't suppose you'll see Harry, because he has been working—writing, you know—and is looking rather shabby. But I'm sure Mother won't like it if I let you go without giving you tea."

Of course that was all wrong according to the habits of Mayfair and Belgravia. On a first call it was not usual to take tea or to be offered it. But Kate lived in Chelsea, where social customs were less formal and more homely. Even at Little Holland House in Kensington, where she went sometimes now that her friend Ellen had married Mr. Watts, the painter—old enough to be her father, poor darling—there was no great formality, although distinguished people like Mr. Tennyson and Mr.

Browning came quite often. But then they were artists and actors and poets, and unconventional people.

"How sweet of you!" said Isobel. "But on a first call, you know . . ."

She was slightly embarrassed lest she should appear in the slightest degree condescending to this pretty sister of a young man who had attracted her very much at Lady Amersham's.

"Just as you like," said Kate, rather huffily.

Isobel hesitated for a moment, and then called to her mother, who was looking out of the carriage window.

"Mamma, Miss Verney is good enough to ask us to tea. I should so much like to accept, as I am sure you would, Mamma."

Lady Alderton was, no doubt, surprised by this invitation, perhaps even a little doubtful whether the proprieties would allow of its acceptance. But she detected the eagerness in Isobel's voice, and, like her daughter, was anxious not to hurt the feelings of a young woman belonging to the Upper, or perhaps even to the Lower, Middle Class. It was the first time she had ever called at a little house like this in a row of little houses of a shabby appearance. While sitting in the carriage she had noticed that some of the lace curtains were very grubby, and that some of the windows had not been cleaned for months or years. On the opposite side of the way an elderly man with a tall hat very much on one side of his head was clinging to a lamp-post in a thoughtful and meditative way, as though wondering whether he could get as far as the next lamp-post by a valiant effort. Undoubtedly he was the worse for drink, thought Lady Alderton. A gipsy-looking woman with a basket on one arm and a baby in the other cried out in a harsh but not unpleasing voice:

"Who'll buy my lavender?
Pretty lavender!
Three sprigs a penn-ai!"

Three or four little gutter urchins with ragged breeches and bare feet were staring at the horses, and one of them did a catherine wheel within a yard of the footman, who was unaccustomed to such low neighbourhoods, at least when he wore his livery, and appeared haughtily unconscious of the ragamuffin.

"Of course I shall be delighted, my dear," said Lady Alderton.

Kate showed them into the front parlour and was relieved presently when her mother appeared, having made herself respectable with uncommon agility on the urgent entreaty of Harry. It was not apparent that she had left off her stays to save time, and she received her visitors quite unflustered and with a frankness and good humour which put them at their ease.

"It's very sweet of you to come, I'm sure," she said. "Harry told me all about you. Of course we are not grand folk, as you can see for yourselves, but I'm quite sure you haven't come to sit on fine furniture or laugh at us for being a bit shabby."

"No, indeed!" cried Lady Alderton hastily. "And I'm sure, Mrs. Verney, you have a charming little house. Delightful! So much nicer than big solemn rooms!"

She glanced round the room with smiling eyes, as though admiring its good taste and elegance—the lustres on the mantelpiece, the wax fruit under a glass case, the Japanese fans tacked on the walls, the horsehair sofa covered with a patchwork rug; the figures of shepherds and shepherdesses on wool mats, and the whatnot crowded with bits of china, among which was a mug inscribed "A Present from Brighton", with a portrait of the Prince Consort on one side and a picture of the Pavilion on the other. There was nothing in this little room to offend the eyes of Lady Alderton, although her town house contained more expensive treasures, more Japanese screens, more whatnots, and more *objets d'art* in wax and shell work under glass cases.

"Well, it's quite cosy," said Mrs. Verney. "If it weren't for the beetles in the basement and the trouble I have with charwomen—nearly all of them drink too much gin, poor old dears—I should have nothing to complain about. . . . Kate, dear, go and make the tea. Do sit down, Lady Alderton. No, not on that chair, if you don't mind. It's a bit weak in the legs. The sofa is quite comfortable."

"Let me help you make the tea," suggested Isobel to Kate while the two mothers talked to each other.

Kate shook her head and laughed.

"Not in those clothes! You're much too grand. Besides, I don't believe you know how to make tea. I expect you have two footmen to cut your bread and butter, and two more to carry in the fancy cakes."

"Oh, that's cruel of you!" cried Isobel, laughing merrily, but at the same time blushing deeply. "You are gibing at me because my parents won't let me do anything for myself! Teach

me how to make tea. You know this is *wonderful* to me. I should love to live in a little house like this and help with the housekeeping. It's like a fairy tale."

"Don't you believe it," said Kate in her frank schoolgirl way. "It's nothing but drudgery. Give me grandeur. Give me wealth. I want to wallow in luxury and be waited on hand and foot by footmen as tall as grenadiers."

"Oh, my dear!" cried Isobel, and then she was a little confused at being too friendly on a first visit, and said, "May I call you Kate? I should so love to be friends with you."

Kate hadn't the slightest objection, and was secretly amused with this elegant young creature who wore such expensive clothes and looked like Miss Herbert in a play at the Princess's Theatre. She smelt deliciously of scent—sweet briar—and her little ermine jacket filled the soul of Kate Verney with admiration and envy.

"I'll let you carry in the tray as a great treat," said Kate.

Isobel carried in the tray from the kitchen, where Alice, with her cap awry and a smudge down one side of her face, stared at her as though she had appeared from a transformation scene in a pantomime—as the fairy queen, or Cinderella at the ball.

And then Harry came down, looking terribly nervous and self-conscious, having changed his clothes to a black jacket and striped trousers fastened under the boots, and a fancy waistcoat, so that he looked quite elegant except for his tie, which in the hurry of the moment had slipped above his dog's-ear collar.

"Hullo, Harry," said Mrs. Verney. "I'm glad you've titivated yourself a little."

Of course she would say a thing like that, being devastating in her candour in any company.

Harry tried to hide his annoyance and his deepening colour. He bowed too stiffly to Lady Alderton, who held his hand for a moment, and too nervously to Isobel. He had a narrow escape from upsetting the cake-stand, and trod on Kate's toe, so that she gave a little squeal, when he turned to place a chair for Isobel. Then he stood with his elbow on the mantelpiece in the attitude of a young Byron, though without affectation, being only consumed with nervousness because of this company. Once or twice while Mrs. Verney chatted to Lady Alderton he was aware of Isobel Ingleby's glance upon him, and once their eyes met and he was aware of her smiling friendliness.

"It must be wonderful to be an actress," he heard her say to Kate. "But isn't it terrifying to know that so many people are looking at you?"

"Of course I've only played small parts," said Kate modestly.

She gave a rendering of her part in the new play at the Haymarket.

"The carriage is at the door, my lady. His lordship is in the rose garden."

"Isn't it ridiculous to think that I have never been to a theatre?" said Isobel. "My Papa is so very Evangelical."

Kate Verney couldn't believe her ears. It was too incredible.

"Do you mean to say you have never seen Kate Terry or Madge Robertson or Miss Herbert?"

"Alas, no!" said Isobel.

"Come and talk to the ladies, Harry," said Mrs. Verney. "Don't stand there looking like Patience on a Monument, my dear."

His mother's free-and-easy manners annoyed him in spite of all his love for her. She talked to Lady Alderton exactly as she did to Kate Terry or Alice Calthrop. It was wonderful in a way, remembering that she had been born in a theatre as he had been, and had travelled about with stock companies in provincial towns with two babies and a man who played the Wolf in the pantomimes. But it was desperately alarming to Harry. There was no knowing what she would say next to these ladies from Belgrave Square. To prevent the worst happening, Harry took the lead in the conversation, forcing down his shyness. And presently, to his own amazement, his shyness left him and he found himself talking easily and naturally to Isobel Ingleby on the subject of Charles Dickens. She had never heard a lecture by this great novelist.

"He's giving some readings at St. James's Hall," said Mrs. Verney. "Why not take Lady Isobel one evening, Harry? I wouldn't mind coming myself."

"Oh, Mamma," cried Isobel, "do you think I might? Do you think Papa would have any objection? Of course it is not like a *theatre*. I know Papa objects to the stage, but a reading by Mr. Dickens is quite different, is it not?"

"I think perhaps Papa might allow it if Mrs. Verney went with you," said Lady Alderton, with some doubt in her voice and a glance at Harry as though wondering whether his moral character might be above suspicion.

"I should be delighted to get tickets," said Harry, as though such a trifling expense were of no account to him.

"I am sure it is very kind of you," said Lady Alderton. "Isobel, of course, will pay for her own ticket."

"Oh, you needn't fret about that," said Mrs. Verney. "We're not as poor as church mice now that Harry is doing a bit of writing."

"Oh, I did not mean to infer . . ." said Lady Alderton nervously.

On the whole the visit went off well. It was arranged that Harry and his mother should take Isobel to hear Mr. Dickens. Kate could not join them, owing to her part at the Haymarket, and Lady Alderton herself was dining out with his lordship at the Russells'.

In the carriage on the way back to Belgrave Square Lady Alderton put her hand on Isobel's under the fur rug.

"An amusing adventure!" she remarked. "Mrs. Verney is just a little vulgar, perhaps, but quite good-natured and *very* vivacious. That pretty Kate is a dear creature, but I think Papa would be greatly shocked if he knew that we had taken tea with actresses. I am not quite sure that we ought to have done so, darling."

"Oh, Mamma," cried Isobel, "is not that very narrow-minded?"

"One has to draw the line," said Lady Alderton. "And we must remember that Papa is Evangelical."

She sighed for a moment as though secretly she regretted this Evangelicalism of his lordship which made life rather more austere than it need have been.

"What did you think of Mr. Verney?" asked Isobel as their carriage approached Belgrave Square by way of Pont Street.

"A good-looking young man," said Lady Alderton. "But not of our class, you know, darling."

"He is a perfect gentleman," said Isobel rather hotly. "And extremely intellectual."

Lady Alderton differed from her slightly.

"A Middle Class gentleman, Isobel. Never forget, my dear, that, whether we like it or not, we belong to the Aristocracy. We must never forget our dignity, however gracious we are—and should be—to the lower orders. As Papa said, it is a dispensation of Providence which we cannot ignore or decline. As we were born, so must we act. Is not that so, darling?"

"I suppose so, Mamma," said Isobel meekly. "But I wish I

belonged to the Middle Class. I think they get more amusement out of life."

"Oh, Isobel," cried Lady Alderton, "I do hope you will never say such a thing to Papa! It would shock him terribly!"

Isobel was careful not to say such a thing to his lordship, not going out of her way to ask for trouble.

XVI

THE reading by Mr. Charles Dickens at St. James's Hall was almost too great an excitement for Isobel Ingleby, who had never been to a theatre or to any dramatic performance owing to her father's moral objection to an institution which he still called "the playhouse" and believed to be the very sink of iniquity. She laughed and wept so emotionally that Mrs. Verney became a little anxious about her and Harry was distressed. Yet she was not alone in her tears and her laughter. The old hall, popularly known as "Jemmy's", in which our Victorian predecessors enjoyed so many raptures of music and entertainment, being more enthusiastic in their youth than the younger generation of to-day, was packed to the last seat in the topmost gallery, and this great audience, of all classes in the social scale, responded like an Æolian harp to the genius of Mr. Dickens.

In evening clothes—far distant from the days when he was a poor little boy in a blacking factory which put a weal across his mind for ever afterwards—he stood by his reading-desk, a rugged-looking man of middle age, not unlike a sea captain with his grizzled beard and lined face. But his blue eyes lighted up when he began to read, and his voice had a thousand tones of pathos and humour, giving life to each character, so that, without costume or scenery, the platform seemed peopled with the children of his brain—Mr. Micawber and David Copperfield, Bill Sykes and Nancy, Little Dorrit and Paul Dombey, Mrs. Gummidge and Sairey Gamp.

There was no one in the audience to whom these characters were unfamiliar. Sick men had prayed to live another week to read the next instalment of a new novel by the great magician. There had been scrimmages at Oxford when undergraduates fought to get those green-covered parts. Many mothers and fathers had read them out to their children, like Mrs. Verney to Harry and Kate. Are there any modern novelists who have this spell? Is it possible for any author now to make a great

audience shed tears or laugh until laughter becomes a glorious agony?

"Really, I'm ashamed of myself," whispered Isobel when Mr. Dickens paused between two of his readings to drink a glass of water. "It's too wonderful! It's like being bewitched. Don't you think so, Mr. Verney?"

"Call him Harry," said Mrs. Verney. "I can't think of him as 'Mister'. You don't mind, do you, Harry?"

He didn't mind in the least, and blushed boyishly and absurdly when Isobel turned to him a little later with another excited whisper.

"Oh, Harry, I do hope Mr. Dickens will read something from *Pickwick*!"

He read something from *Pickwick*. The trial scene and the speech of Sergeant Buzzfuzz.

As the audience surged out into a rainy night their eyes were still alight with enjoyment and laughter.

"Thank God for Dickens," said an old gentleman, putting up his umbrella and shielding an old lady in a bonnet and shawl until she was safely inside a four-wheeled cab.

It was hard to get a four-wheeled cab because of the crowd and the rain. The carriage folk took precedence, so that Isobel had to wait under the porch with Mrs. Verney while Harry ran ahead to bring back a "growler", as it was called. It was the first time in her life that Isobel had ever done such a thing or been anywhere in London without a carriage and a footman. It seemed to her as though at last she had escaped into life. All this was wonderfully amusing and delightful. She was glad it was raining. It made the evening more adventurous. She liked to be pushed about by Middle Class people, all very good-natured but anxious to get some kind of vehicle. It was so different from driving to her house in Belgrave Square in a pampered way.

"How beautiful the gaslights look in the rain," she observed to Mrs. Verney.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed that lady, "I wonder what has become of Harry. That boy of mine is always in a dream. I wouldn't be surprised if he forgets all about us and goes home by omnibus."

But there was no fear of that. Harry was suffering atrocious anxiety lest he should fail to get a cab for a young lady whose clothes would be utterly spoilt if the rain made them damp. She had called him Harry as if they had known each other for

years. Sometimes it had been impossible to listen to Charles Dickens because he had to look at this girl by his side with her eyes as bright as stars in the darkness of the hall. She had laughed like a child at a circus during the comic parts, and her laughter was the prettiest music he had ever heard. He could hardly bear it when she wept, with a little lace handkerchief mopping her tears. It was really dreadful to know that she was suffering such emotion.

"Hi, cabby! Stop, can't you, you blithering old fool!"

The lean-ribbed horse was pulled up sharply with a slither of hoofs on the wet roadway. Harry brought the growler back in triumph to St. James's Hall, where he saw Isobel standing under the porch with the gaslight gleaming upon her white cloak and upturned face. She was smiling at her own thoughts—at some inward happiness—and Harry was astonished and awed by her beauty, so virginal, so innocent, he thought, so exquisite. Because of his shyness he hardly spoke a word in the four-wheeled cab on the way to Belgrave Square, but thrilled at the warmth of her body close to him as she sat between him and his mother. The white fur of her cloak tickled his cheek.

"The next thing I must do is to go to a theatre!" she exclaimed excitedly.

"Good gracious, yes!" said Mrs. Verney. "Why, I should die if I didn't go to a play now and then."

"I am afraid Papa will object if I ask him," said Isobel.

"He must be a narrow-minded old buffer, then," said Mrs. Verney, and she was surprised at Harry's ejaculation of warning and alarm.

"Mother!"

"Of course we are all rather afraid of him," explained Isobel simply. "It is not because he is bad-tempered or anything like that, but of course one has to be very respectful to one's father—especially when he has a great name and all that."

She was afraid that this speech might sound snobbish, and hastened to remove this possible impression.

"I do so envy people who have not been brought up grandly," she said to Mrs. Verney. "Poverty is so much nicer really, do you not think? I mean, not real poverty, of course—that would be dreadful—but simple comfort without wealth."

"Oh, I could do with a bit more," said Mrs. Verney in her candid way. "I'm fond of pretty frocks and lacy things, and I should like to wear real fur now and then, like your cloak, my dear. Well, it's no use wanting."

Harry opened the door and jumped out as the cab stopped at the big house in Belgrave Square. He gave his hand to Isobel and she held it tightly for a moment.

"I have had a thrilling evening," she told him. "I shall always be grateful for such a treat."

"I'm glad you enjoyed it," said Harry.

A footman came out of the house with a big umbrella. Through the open door Harry could see into a marble hall where another footman in livery stood waiting for his young mistress.

Perhaps it was that glimpse of grandeur belonging to a world so different from his own which made him dejected and irritable when he joined his mother.

"Mother, you ought not to have called Lord Alderton a narrow-minded old buffer. I can't think why you say such things."

"I say what comes into my head, my dear."

XVII

ISOBEL went into her father's study. He had returned from the dinner at the Russells', as she learnt from Robert.

"Papa," she said, after tapping at the door and hearing his gruff "Come in!"—"I have had a wonderful time. Mr. Dickens was too splendid."

His lordship kissed her forehead.

"I am glad you have enjoyed yourself. I do not altogether approve of Dickens. He writes about very low people and arouses sympathy for the Mob, about whom you know my own opinions."

"Oh, Papa! If you had heard Mr. Dickens doing the trial scene from *Pickwick*!"

"It tends to ridicule the Law," said his lordship. "I am sure it is dangerous, with all these Fenians about."

Isobel was silent for a moment. She was screwing up her courage for something very audacious, for something which she knew was almost beyond hope.

"Papa, would you allow me to go to the theatre one evening—properly chaperoned, of course—and to see something serious and uplifting, like Shakespeare? I do so want to see a play, and I am sure it would not do me any harm."

His lordship was startled and annoyed.

"My dear Isobel, certainly not. I am astonished that you should make such a request. I regard the playhouse as a sink of iniquity. I think I have told you so before."

"Yes, Papa, but do you not think you may be remembering the theatre as it was in earlier times? Several girls I know go quite often and think it most respectable and elevating, as well as vastly entertaining."

Lord Alderton had sunk back into a deep armchair, while Isobel stood by the mantelpiece with one foot on the brass fender, looking at him through the tall mirror over the mantelshelf. He tapped nervously with his finger-tips on the mahogany arm and she saw that he frowned heavily.

"My dear Isobel," he said again, "there are many reasons why I must forbid you to go to a playhouse."

"Forbid, Papa?" cried Isobel dolefully and turning towards him with her hands a little raised.

"Yes, forbid, Isobel. I am your father and responsible for your spiritual welfare and moral safety. It is just because the playhouse is vastly entertaining, as you say—though, thank God, I have never entered such a place—that it is so dangerous and demoralizing. We were not brought upon this earth to be entertained by frivolous and foolish spectacles, if they are not worse than that. We were brought here to do our duty in that station of life to which it shall please Almighty God to call us. You, my dear, have been called to a high station. It is for you to set an example of virtue and discretion to English womanhood. If the nobility fail to live up to their high privilege of ruling the lower classes and setting a standard of morality, then Heaven help England. In that day we shall no longer deserve our place and such power as the Almighty has bestowed upon us. Already some of our own class are sadly wanting in dignity and decency. The life of the young Marquis of Hastings who died recently was a reproach and a scandal."

"Yes, but, Papa," cried Isobel, "I really do not see what that has to do with an occasional visit to the theatre. It is surely our duty to encourage art and intelligence?"

His lordship was not at all sure. He had very grave suspicion of art and a contempt for much of the modern stuff that masqueraded under its name. The Pre-Raphaelites had made themselves ridiculous.

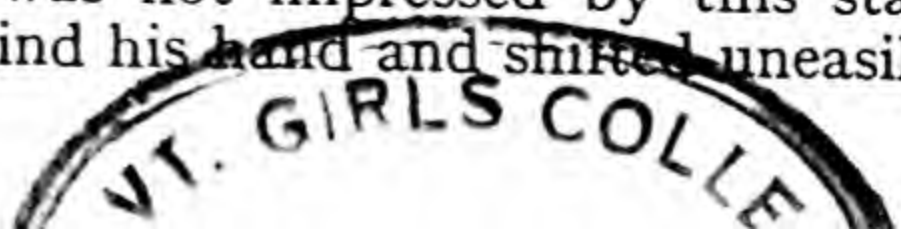
"But think of Mr. Watts!" said Isobel. "His pictures inculcate the highest ideals, with a great message to humanity."

"What kind of message?" asked his lordship impatiently. "I do not see the moral of a young lady slightly clad playing on a broken harpstring above the world. Nor did I observe any message of spiritual significance, still less of Evangelical righteousness, in his picture of Paolo and Francesca in an unholy embrace."

Isobel was silent. She had a sudden conviction that her father was a Philistine on the subject of art and that it was quite useless arguing with him about it.

"The Prince of Wales often goes to the theatre, Papa," she remarked, as a more likely form of persuasion.

But Lord Alderton was not impressed by this statement. He coughed slightly behind his hand and shifted uneasily in his chair.



"With the highest respect for the Prince as Heir Apparent, my dear, I fear that I am distrustful of him as a leader of social life. He goes to race meetings. He plays cards with men of whom I hear not much to their credit. I regret to say that I have heard scandalous stories about the Prince which I could not repeat to an innocent girl. He is the cause of much anxiety to our gracious Queen."

Isobel bit her lip. She was on the verge of tears. After a reading by Mr. Dickens she was fired with desire to see a play. She was quite sure that the theatre would open up a new world of delight to her, and after meeting pretty Kate Verney she could find no terror in the private life of actresses.

"Papa, I really have set my mind on going to the theatre now and then."

His lordship rose, and his lips tightened, and his very whiskers seemed to stiffen.

"Isobel, you forget yourself. Have I not told you that I have forbidden you? You say you have set your mind on it. Kindly remember that I have set my mind *against* it, and that as long as you are under my roof as an unmarried girl I expect obedience, duty, and respect."

"Very well, Papa."

Isobel forced back the tears that came trembling to her lashes. She turned her head to hide this sign of weakness.

Lord Alderton seemed reassured by the meekness of her reply, and before she left the room kissed her again on the forehead.

"Good night, my dear, and do not entertain dangerous and deceitful fancies which beset the path of youth. Ask God to bless you and your loving parents who only wish for your happiness and virtue."

Isobel said good night and ran very quickly upstairs to her bedroom and shut the door with an angry little slam.

It was dreadful, she thought, to be debarred from going to see a play, especially now that she knew Kate and Harry who thought it ridiculous and unbelievable. For a moment a rush of tears filled her eyes. She had been over-excited by the Dickens reading.

She sat in darkness, without troubling to light her candles. Then she went to the window overlooking Belgrave Square and looked out at the glow over London.

A little to the right was Chelsea and Royal Avenue. Harry would be sitting up late, perhaps, writing an article or a story. Perhaps one day he would be as great as Dickens. He had very

thoughtful eyes, and was better-looking than Mr. Dickens could have been, even as a young man. Of course, he was very shy of her. When she had dropped her handkerchief in St. James's Hall—it must have been quite wet after the death of Little Dorrit—he stooped to pick it up at the same time as she did. Their heads had touched and he coloured up quite crimson with embarrassment. Next to Arthur Marmington she liked him better than any young man she had ever met, and he was more romantic than Arthur, really, as he belonged to the Middle Class and had to earn his own living. She kissed her hand to him across the tree-tops in Belgrave Square, luminous where the gas lamps touched their foliage, and then was ashamed of herself for this unseen gesture of affection, so that she blushed even in the darkness.

XVIII

ARTHUR MANNINGTON, the future Earl of Amersham, comes into the life of Isobel Ingleby a good deal. She had an affection for him always, and, what is perhaps rare between men and women, especially young men and women, a very high respect. Some of his contemporaries accuse him of a certain priggishness, and perhaps there may have been just a slight touch of that in his character, due to his upbringing and the sentiment of his time, but to Isobel, who knew his ambitions and ideals, his slight touch of austerity was due to a real nobility of soul.

He put Isobel—and all women of his class—upon an impossible pedestal, where some of them could only maintain their position precariously. He endowed them with an innocence of evil and an ignorance about the realities of life which they did not actually possess, having read the Bible and Shakespeare and knowing a good deal about their own emotions, and something about their fathers and brothers, who were not always without blemish. He detested the usual amusements of frivolous young men, such as betting and racing and card-playing, and he was only once drunk at Oxford, on the night of the boat race when his own crew beat Cambridge by a length and a half. That austerity accounted, no doubt, for the charge of priggishness, especially as he had a spiritual and knightly look which daunted the ordinary undergraduate outside the serious set.

It is doubtful whether the undergraduate of to-day, however serious and studious, puts in so many hours of hard reading as Arthur Mannington and his group at Balliol when Dr. Jowett was at the height of his reputation. It is hard to believe—although I am sure it is true—that they thought nothing of sixteen hours' "slog", as they called it. They drank enormous quantities of strong tea, put wet towels round their heads, and learnt pages of classical authors by heart. On the eve of the examinations they were a prey to the most acute anxieties lest they should not get a first, and some of them were so paralysed with fear when they faced the papers that the very things they had learnt

went clean out of their heads as they sat in a dazed state after excess of brain-fag.

"First, sir?" says the old *Punch* story, as an undergraduate hurries to catch a train.

"No, ploughed, by Jove!"

Arthur did not suffer that fate. He won the Newdigate and other prizes, and Jowett, the Master, put his hand on the young man's shoulder—he was the son of an Earl—and said a few words of congratulation and advice.

"Very well done, young man. But you will be ill-advised if you pay too much attention to verse-making and literature. Nation-making is better than versifying. There are great opportunities in a political career for a young man with powerful friends. If I were in your place I should go into the House of Commons and take my chance in the public arena. There is no reason why you should not be Prime Minister one day. If that happens to be your ambition, never make an enemy when you can make a friend, and cultivate people who may be useful to you later on."

"I am deeply obliged to you, Master," said Arthur Mannington, overwhelmed by this condescension of the great man, but somewhat shocked by the worldliness of the Master's advice. At that time, in the first flush of his young idealism, he did not aspire to be Prime Minister or to cultivate useful people, but to serve God, his country, and humanity, without personal ambition. Is it possible that there were ever young men like that? I honestly believe there were, though now it may seem incredible to a more cynical generation, without reverence for their politicians.

It is natural that a young man of his temperament should have been attracted by the Ritualists in the Anglican Church, but he arrived at Oxford after the first enthusiasm of that Movement which Newman and Pusey had inspired with a passion of eloquence and controversy which had shaken the English Church and the whole nation. Newman had "gone over" to Rome with many disciples. The Evangelicals had led a counter-attack with "No Popery" as its war-cry. The first flames had died down. Dr. Jowett's influence was on the side of "common sense" and against any kind of fanaticism or extreme views. Scornful of mysticism, not believing much in any idealism, cynical of youth, suspicious of enthusiasm, contemptuous of controversy, he belonged to the eighteenth-century tradition of Church and State, with good port at dinner. It is no wonder that when a distinguished lady was asked what religious teaching she gave her children, she

answered, "I never let them learn anything of which Dr. Jowett would disapprove."

The Master insisted upon the strict minimum of spiritual discipline, and he summoned to his presence an undergraduate who had failed to attend the necessary number of "chapels". The young man had his excuse ready.

"Sir," he said solemnly, "I have sought God everywhere and failed to find Him."

"Mr. —," replied the Master very calmly, "unless you find Him before 10 a.m. to-morrow I have no alternative but to send you down."

Arthur, Viscount Mannington, was not encouraged, therefore, by college influences towards anything beyond the minimum of mysticism or ritual, but at this time, as he confessed to Isobel, he desired some form of religion which would demand more self-sacrifice and spirituality than seemed possible in the easy-going form of worship attended very perfunctorily by his fellow undergraduates.

"But, Arthur," cried Isobel, in some distress, during one of her visits to Amersham House, "for goodness' sake don't become a Ritualist. Papa would never let you come and stay with us again."

Arthur smiled and reminded her of the supreme words:

"If any man come to Me and hate not his father and mother . . ."

Newman's *Apologia pro Vita Sua* affected him profoundly for a time, partly because of its exquisite style, and he went through a term at Oxford when he was on the verge of going over to Rome. He invited a young Catholic priest to his rooms to meet a group of undergraduates who had secret leanings towards the Old Faith, as it was called, and they had earnest discussions for long hours, in which the doctrine of Transubstantiation, the evidence of Tradition, and the validity of Anglican Orders were disputed with a gravity and earnestness remarkable for young men, who might have been expected to take more interest in a pretty face and a neat ankle than in such theological subjects.

It was again the influence of Dr. Jowett which ended these meetings. He did not use any authority, but relied upon irony to kill these spiritual yearnings of youth. He was supported from afar by the author of the *Origin of Species*, and still more by Mr. Darwin's over-zealous interpreters, who used the doctrine of Evolution and the Survival of the Fittest to deny the

immortality of the soul and to defend the materialistic philosophy of Lancashire manufacturers in an age which had grown rich upon child labour, slave conditions in factories, and the progress of machinery.

Arthur, like many other young men of this period, went through agonies of doubt after his religious phase, and assumed for a time that Science had destroyed Faith for evermore. He read Tennyson's *In Memoriam* as a revelation of philosophic agnosticism, like young Mr. Thorpe when he was Isobel's tutor. Then, needing some outlet for his instinctive idealism, he turned to Liberalism as a humanitarian gospel, and decided to dedicate his career to the advancement of Democracy, the relief of poverty, and the principles of liberty, with Mr. Gladstone as his great prophet.

It was a break with the tradition of his family and a rebellion against his father's authority, the seventh Earl of Amersham being a Tory of the old school who had a robust sense of humour and a certain tolerance, unlike Isobel's Papa. After some heated arguments Lord Amersham decided that youth must have its own way.

"Believe me, Arthur, my boy," he said, "you will live to regret the day when you went over to the enemy's camp. Unless we keep back Democracy we shall find ourselves at its mercy, and it won't be merciful. These Radicals won't stop until they have undermined our privileges, confiscated our property, and taxed us out of existence. Then what is going to happen? Do you think England will be any happier governed by a lot of louts, ignorant of the Queen's English, without tradition behind them, and subservient to the mob mind, which will be their own masters?"

"We must educate Democracy and make it worthy of self-government," said Arthur. "You must admit, Father, that the best brains in the country are outside the Aristocracy and in the ranks of the Liberals."

"Pah!" said Lord Amersham. "I do not admit it for a moment, Arthur. It's merely that the Liberal Johnnies have the gift of the gab. Gladstone, John Bright, Cobden, glib-tongued fellows playing to the gallery and stuffed with false sentiment. Give me the old Tory character which doesn't say much and says that damn badly, but stands fast to the ancient tradition, with its feet on the earth in the fields of its fathers, now ruined by your Radicals with their Free Trade doctrine."

"We're living in an industrial age," said Arthur.

"More's the pity," replied Lord Amersham. "Damn the industrial age."

"We must adapt ourselves to the progress of mankind," said Arthur.

"I refuse to adapt myself. And I don't believe in the progress of mankind," said his lordship. "Human nature has always been the same, and always will be."

"Education will change men's minds," argued Arthur. "We can't stand still, Father. Besides, the upper classes are not playing the game. The London slums are a disgrace to England. The conditions in the factories are still abominable. I was talking to a Balliol man whose father is in cotton up in Lancashire. He says the conditions of labour are sickening, so that he hates the thought of all the wealth that will come to him by such methods. If we don't reform such things we shall have revolution, and deserve it."

"Good God!" exclaimed Lord Amersham, "you're a damned young Radical, Arthur! Well, I suppose it's in the air. There's nothing I can do about it. May I ask what my son and heir proposes to do when he comes down from Oxford?"

"I had an idea of standing for Parliament," said Arthur, "if you have no objection, sir. Of course, I should fight on the Liberal side."

Lord Amersham burst out laughing.

"If I have no objection! I like that. I object like hell, my boy. But you are old enough to work out your own destiny. As long as you don't become a Papist or a Fenian I shall be thankful for small mercies. Meanwhile I suppose you expect me to provide the necessary expenses for your political career—in a party which I despise and abhor?"

"Well," said Arthur, "I rely on your generosity, sir."

"Exactly," said Lord Amersham dryly. "The rebel relies on the generosity of his old-fashioned and ridiculous parent, for whose intelligence and experience he has no respect."

"I have the greatest respect for you, sir," said Arthur humbly and sincerely.

Lord Amersham put his arm round his son's shoulder.

"I've no respect for myself, dear boy. I'm just a rough hunting man, fond of horseflesh and ploughed fields, and old-fashioned ways, fast disappearing. You take after your mother all spirit and poetry. Well, as long as you and your Liberals leave me with a horse and a dog or two . . ."

"Thanks, Father," said Arthur. "I am very deeply obliged

to you. When I come down from Oxford I propose to stay in town for a while and study life at first hand until I begin my political career."

Lord Amersham gave a good-natured laugh.

"Well, I hope you'll like Life," he said. "Do not get into trouble with the girls, my boy. Some of those London hussies..."

He saw a faint flush of colour in his son's face and did not pursue this line of thought. This boy of his was thin-skinned and not at all like his father at the same age. Perhaps that was best. Women led to a lot of trouble and expense.

XIX

It was about this time that Isobel Ingleby began to lead a "double life", as she described it in after years with pretended contrition for certain naughty episodes, but with amusement and regret for stolen hours of romance. It was a note from Kate Verney which led her first into disobedience and duplicity.

My dear Lady Isobel, wrote Kate in her scrawly script which had been the despair of Mr. Jenkins when correcting her exercises, *I have three tickets for a matinée of Caste, by Mr. Robertson, who is a friend of ours. As I am not acting just now, will you come with me and Harry? We should both be delighted—and honoured. Sorry they are only for the Dress Circle and hope you won't mind not having a Box. Harry sends his love. At least I'm sure he would like to!*

Isobel received this letter at the breakfast-table and blushed when Richard became inquisitive and pretended that it was a *billet doux*. Her father had just finished reading family prayers and was absorbed in *The Times*, which seemed to annoy him as usual, judging from certain sounds like "Pshaw!" and "Pah!" which came from his direction. Lady Alderton was presiding over the coffee-pot—the servants not waiting at table during the breakfast meal—and Miss Venables, who was still with them although looking for another place now that Isobel no longer needed her instruction, kept passing things to Richard, for whose appetite she had a tender regard.

"*Caste!*" She had longed to go to this play ever since one of her girl friends had described its beauty and emotion. It would be such fun going with Kate and Harry Verney. In the Dress Circle, too, and at a *matinée*! And yet, after that conversation with her father she did not dare to ask for permission again. He would refer to the Sink of Iniquity without the slightest doubt.

"Whom is your letter from, dear?" asked Lady Alderton,

seeing her sitting abstractedly without getting on with her breakfast.

"Just a little note from Kate Verney, Mamma."

She decided not to mention the tickets. It is possible that she had already decided to accept the invitation, but it was not until the afternoon that she could make up her mind to write a letter saying how delighted she would be to do so. She would join them at the theatre just before the *matinée*, which, as she saw from *The Times*, commenced at half-past two o'clock on Wednesday.

It was a desperate deed. She trembled to think what would happen if Papa found out that she had deliberately disobeyed him. Also it would be extremely difficult to escape from Belgrave Square after luncheon on Wednesday and get to the theatre without attracting notice. After sending Robert round with the note to the Verneys she suffered agonies of apprehension, slightly mingled with remorse. It was the first time she had been deliberately undutiful or actually deceitful. It was as though she were being tempted by the Devil. And yet—perhaps this was the Devil whispering his false deceits—there could be no *moral* wrong in going to see a play like *Caste*, and surely it was her father's intolerance which forced her to conceal an innocent adventure.

On the Wednesday morning fortune, or that evil spirit, played into her hands. Her father and mother were going to a luncheon party at the Malmesburys', where they hoped to hear news of the political situation, which seemed to indicate an approaching Dissolution, followed by a General Election. Richard remarked casually that he was lunching with Arthur. Only Miss Venables would remain for the midday meal. How to deal with dear Venny was the outstanding question, and Isobel solved it by making her an accomplice.

"I am going to the theatre this afternoon, Venny, with some friends of mine. You needn't say anything to Papa or Mamma. It is a little secret of my own."

She spoke those words lightly as though they were of no account, but Miss Venables laid down her knife and fork, swallowed a piece of potato as though choking, became very pale, and stared at Isobel as though she had confessed to a murder.

"Oh, my dear! Surely not! I really cannot believe it. You know his lordship's horror of the theatre."

"Yes," said Isobel. "But I think it is very intolerant of Papa. I am old enough to decide these things for myself. Anyhow, I am going."

"My dear, I implore you not to! It will lead to the *greatest* trouble. It is not dutiful, and it is not frank. The least you can do is to beg his lordship's permission."

"I have begged, Venny, and he has refused it."

"Well, then, there is nothing more to be said. You simply *cannot* go, my dear."

"Venny dear, I am going," said Isobel firmly. "And I trust you to say nothing about it. I know I can rely on your loyalty."

"But, Isobel," cried poor Miss Venables, "if I am loyal to you I must be disloyal to your honoured father and mother."

"Do I not come first, Venny? Your little pupil! Your life-long friend!"

She put her arm round her governess's neck and kissed her effusively, and broke down her moral resistance.

"Oh, my dear, you know I would die for you. But it hurts me dreadfully to see you walking into sin."

"Nonsense, Venny! It is not sin. And I am not walking. I am going to take a hansom cab."

If she had said she was going to fly away on a broomstick with the Devil himself she could not have aroused more terror in the breast of Miss Venables.

"A hansom cab! Alone? Isobel, it is dreadful! It is impossible! A young lady like you *cannot* drive alone in a hansom cab. If I have to drag you back with both hands I cannot allow you to do it."

"Allow? Venny dear, remember your place, please."

Miss Venables burst into tears. She was still weeping, though in a more subdued way, when Isobel left the house while the servants were below stairs, walked to the other side of Belgrave Square, and raised her parasol to a "cabby" perched on the high seat above his hansom. Each step she had taken was away from all the discipline of her early years. When she raised that parasol it needed as much courage as though she had drawn a sword to lead a cavalry charge against enemy guns. When she climbed for the first time into a hansom cab the adventure was as great as though she had set off for the uttermost ends of the earth, where she might find "antres deep and deserts idle, and the anthropophagi who do carry their heads beneath their shoulders". There was also the sense of sin which bit into her conscience like the fangs of a snake. And yet, so deceitful is the heart of man and woman, so wily are the ways of Satan, she was also enjoying herself!

It was thrilling when the cabby opened the little trap above

her head and said, "What address, Missy?" and when she answered, "The Haymarket Theatre," as though she were quite used to such a journey.

A long whip flicked over her head, and a poor lean horse staggered in the shafts and went forward with a klip-klop of hoofs over the hard road. She leaned with her muff on the apron of the cab for a moment and then drew back into the shelter of the vehicle, and shut the little glass windows in front. It would never do to be seen by any of her mother's friends. If Richard or Arthur happened to be strolling by, they would be astounded to see her, and Arthur would be horrified. None of his seven sisters would ever dream of driving in a hansom cab without a chaperon of the highest respectability.

Harry and Kate were waiting for her under the porch of the Haymarket, and Kate seized her by the hand when she alighted from the high step.

"How splendid! . . . I can hardly believe you are going to see your first play!"

Isobel paid the cabman eighteenpence, much to his disappointment and annoyance.

"What's this, Missy?" he asked, leaning down from his high perch and staring at the coins as though they had bitten his hand.

"Isn't it enough?" asked Isobel, much confused.

"Quite enough," said Harry Verney, stepping forward. "Be off, my man."

He stood with his hat off until Isobel turned and gave him her hand and laughed with excitement and nervousness.

"I feel very wicked! . . . This is forbidden fruit, you know. . . . I do not know what I should say to Papa if he found out that I have come to the Sink of Iniquity."

She was aware that people were glancing at her and smiling. Perhaps they were astonished to see a young lady of her appearance come out of a hansom alone. It is more likely that they were attracted by her flushed cheeks and a dancing light in her eyes, and a look of eagerness as though she was about to enter Paradise. She wore a green silk skirt over her hoops and a Zouave jacket over her laced bodice, and a little straw hat with a green feather curled round its crown. She noticed that Harry seemed to like the look of her and glanced at her with a shy homage in his eyes. She liked the look of *him*, in a brown suit with a white waistcoat and a big tie with blue and white spots. He reminded her uncommonly of David Copperfield.

"Come on!" cried Kate, clasping her hand. "Second row in the Dress Circle, and fifty steps to climb——"

"Radiant Sister of the Day,
Awake, arise, and come away!"

Isobel picked up her skirt and ran up the stone steps, panting a little when she reached the top.

The Dress Circle was already crowded when they took their places. Lady Isobel Ingleby, daughter of the Earl of Alderton, was seated in the very midst of the Middle Classes. Two school-girls with their Mamma were sucking sugar candy. A young couple held hands surreptitiously. There were rows and rows of people who looked as though they had travelled in omnibuses from Clapham and Herne Hill and other suburbs. Not carriage folk, that is to say. Not the nobility and gentry of Belgrave Square and Mayfair, but perfectly respectable and very well behaved. They were all laughing and chattering and calling for programmes, and changing seats, and dropping handbags, and arranging shawls, and enjoying themselves in anticipation of delight.

Above the Dress Circle was the Gallery, and below it the Pit, from both of which places other and stranger noises proceeded. Boys were whistling and cat-calling. Girls were giggling, with little squeals of laughter. Now and then a voice rang out with some Cockney humour.

"No Caste harrogance in the pit, Charley! . . . Tommy, make room for your Uncle. . . . Mind your whiskers, sir. This young woman's eyes will set them afire if you ain't wery careful!"

Up in the Gallery there was a stamping of feet, and presently several voices joined in the chorus of "Villikins and his Dinah".

Kate Verney spied a friend in the Stalls and leaned over the plush-covered rail of the Dress Circle, waving excitedly to a girl who saw her at last and fluttered a fan and made laughing eyes behind it.

"There's Alice Calthrop," said Kate, turning to Harry. "Oh, and look! . . . There's Ellen with her elderly husband, Mr. Watts. I can't think why she married such an old buffer. Ridiculous, I call it!"

Isobel sat very quiet. She was in the Sink of Iniquity. It was her first play, and she had broken one of the Ten Commandments to come here. When the gas lamps were turned out

by the attendants she took Kate's hand and held it tightly, not because she was frightened, but because all this gave her an unutterable thrill. And then the curtain went up and the play began and she sat bewitched.

It was more wonderful than Mr. Dickens's reading. The characters on the stage were absolutely real. And the drama, she thought, was overwhelming in its truth to life. Caste! She could see herself in the elder sister—the daughter of a noble family whose estate goes to a distant cousin. Of course it was *impossible* for her to accept his charity. Her pride, her haughtiness, were superb. And then a distant and humble relative, the old bookseller, who offers them a home in Bloomsbury. What a charming old man, although he drops his h's and his red handkerchief, and shows by every gesture that he belongs to the Lower Middle Class!

The two sisters are very brave in the poverty of this little shop in Bloomsbury, so shabby, so very ill-furnished, so poverty-stricken. At least, the elder sister is very brave, though the younger one is fretful, poor child. Of course Isobel guessed at once that the new shop assistant is the distant cousin who has inherited the great estate. He had fallen in love instantly with the elder sister. One could see at a glance that he was a gentleman, very high-minded, and noble, and kind. A little like Arthur Mannington, Isobel thought. He serves in the shop without a thought of his own dignity or a touch of snobbishness, and makes friends with a comical errand boy who falls in love with the younger sister and is always staring at her through the glass window.

Then the younger sister is tempted by one of her former friends—a most immoral young man—who wishes to lead her astray with no honourable intentions of matrimony. . . .

Isobel could hardly bear it during the scene when the younger girl creeps down at night to meet her dishonourable lover, and when she is discovered and saved by the noble young man who pretends to be a shop assistant.

It became still more thrilling and painful and tragic when the elder sister comes down and overhears words which make her believe that the man she loves is about to betray an innocent girl. There has been a party, and the noble young man has brought her some lovely flowers. It was for these she had come downstairs. But now, standing alone on the stage after terrible words to her lover—who is too proud to explain what has happened, and too loyal to betray the secret of the younger girl—

she plucks the petals from the flowers, lets them fall to the floor, and is dissolved in a passion of weeping.

Isobel wept too. Her handkerchief was wringing wet, as it had been when Mr. Dickens read the death of Little Dorrit. But this was even more poignant. She could hardly prevent herself from sobbing aloud.

When the curtain came down on the second act and the gas was lit again, she was ashamed to be seen in such a condition by Harry Verney and Kate. Certainly her eyes were red and her cheeks tear-stained. She stole a glance at Harry, sitting next her, and was relieved and touched to see that he also was blinking away tears and was afraid to turn his face to her. Only Kate seemed unmoved.

"Jolly well acted," she said cheerfully. "Kate was marvellous in that last bit where she drops the flowers. But what an ass that elder sister was not to accept the offer of the old house! I don't see why she should have been so proud and haughty. Silly, I call it!"

"Oh, but Kate," cried Isobel, "it was like accepting charity from a stranger. She *couldn't* have done so. Don't you understand?"

"But she accepted charity from the old bookseller," argued Kate. "I don't see the difference."

"But then he was her uncle," said Isobel. "Besides, she was going to help him in the shop."

"A precious lot of help!" said Kate cruelly. "She only added to the expense and made the poor old man go bankrupt faster than he would have done."

"Shut up, Kate!" said Harry. "You're spoiling it all. I think it's an excellent play. The best thing old Robertson has ever done."

"I have a perfect right to my own opinion, Harry," said Kate huffily. "And don't you forget I know more about plays than you do, seeing that I act in them."

She recovered her good humour and recited the famous words of her longest part:

"The carriage is at the door, my lady. . . . His lordship is in the rose garden.'"

The last act was delicious and comforting. Everything came all right. Even the immoral young man declared his intentions to be perfectly honourable. The elder sister would marry her noble young lover and go back to the old home. He wrote a cheque to pay off the villain who wished to sell up the poor old

bookseller unless his beautiful niece would marry him, so vulgar, so coarse, so detestable a specimen of the Lower Middle Class.

"I shall *never* forget this!" said Isobel as she left the theatre. "It is a great lesson. It is the most beautiful thing I have ever seen. Caste is a terrible handicap, don't you think? I mean, one ought not to think too much about blue blood and social standing."

She became embarrassed for a moment, realizing that her own blood and social standing were different from those of Kate and Harry.

Kate smiled at her sideways and quoted Mr. Tennyson.

"Kind hearts are more than coronets
And simple faith than Norman blood."

"... Personally I should like to wear a coronet and a long white train. I believe I should look rather well in such raiment."

"Kate!" protested Harry, laughing nervously. "You're incorrigible!"

He turned to Isobel and gave her a friendly and tempting invitation.

"There's a very nice bun shop at the corner of the Haymarket. I hope you will come and have a glass of sherry with us?"

But Isobel was like Cinderella when midnight struck at the ball. It was five o'clock. She could just get back in time to slip up to her room before her mother came back from her round of visits after lunching with Lord Malmesbury.

"I must fly!" she said. "Can you get me a hansom, Harry?"

"Let's all squeeze in!" suggested Kate. "It's on our way home, and it won't cost more than an extra sixpence."

They squeezed in so tightly that Isobel's green silk frock was rather crushed between Harry and Kate, and her hoops billowed up in front.

Kate was inclined to burst into song until checked by her brother after the first line of "I dreamt that I dwelt in Marble Halls".

"Do behave yourself, Kate, for heaven's sake!"

"I'm enjoying myself," said Kate. "And why shouldn't I give a treat to the old gentleman aloft? Aren't you rather a spoil-sport? I don't know what's come over you. Are you getting a swelled head because you have had a story accepted in the *Bow Bells' Novelette*? Or are you on your best manners because of the Lady Isobel of the Moated Grange?"

Harry Verney blushed because of these sisterly gibes. But he envied that rowdy sister of his when Isobel Ingleby kissed her on both cheeks before running up the steps of her big house in Belgrave Square.

The door was opened by Robert, her favourite footman, who looked aghast at the hansom cab from which she had descended.

Isobel put her fingers to her lips and whispered to him.

"Robert, not a word! For heaven's sake."

"I know my place, Lady Isobel," said Robert gravely. Then a slight flutter of his left eyelid revealed an inner spasm of humour and humanity.

"His lordship has just retired to his study," he said.

Isobel fled upstairs, where Miss Venables received her with a cry of relief mingled with terror.

"Oh, my dear, I have been suffering agonies of moral apprehension."

"I have been in Paradise," said Isobel. "I am going there again."

XX

It must be admitted that Isobel Ingleby was not without guile and that the innocence and meekness of Victorian girlhood as depicted by writers of that period were not unblemished in her young bosom. In order to enjoy the liberty which her parents denied her because of her station in life and its social proprieties, she invented little schemes which appeared innocent enough but had hidden motives.

Her plea, for instance, that Miss Venables should remain on as her companion seemed very reasonable and commendable to his lordship when she explained that she wished to pursue the study of Geography and Roman History—of which dear Miss Venables knew so much—instead of wasting her time like so many other girls. It sounded very plausible, also, when she explained further that she needed a chaperon to accompany her on walks in the Park for her health's sake—and who could be more suitable than dear Miss Venables?—or when she visited the National Gallery, the British Museum, the Aquarium, and other places for the improvement of her mind. Then there were the afternoon concerts at St. James's Hall, which she very much wished to attend. Of course she could not expect Mamma to go with her to all these places, as she had so many social engagements.

"By all means, my dear Isobel," said his lordship unsuspectingly. "I should much regret to lose the services of Miss Venables, for whom I have a high respect, and I am glad, my dear, that you have such serious intentions, instead of indulging in frivolity like so many young women of to-day. I will speak to Miss Venables and say how much I wish her to remain in our household."

"Thank you, Papa," said Isobel.

In the secret chamber of her mind—perhaps she did not open that little door too widely even to her own consciousness—she knew that Venny was like putty in her hands and that as a chaperon she could be made into an accomplice in many little

adventures outside the bounds of Belgrave Square and its social code. With Venny she could dodge off to a *matinée* now and then, after a few minutes in the British Museum for conscience's sake. With Venny, who could be left in the brougham with a book from Mudie's, she might meet some of Kate Verney's interesting friends—and have a little talk now and then with her interesting brother, "David Copperfield", as she sometimes called him. There were great possibilities with Miss Venables as her faithful companion.

Then there was another little idea which came to her one day after reading an advertisement in *The Times*:

Mrs. Bland and the Misses Bland desire to inform the Nobility and Gentry that their dancing classes will be resumed as usual on March 1, and on every Tuesday and Thursday until further notice. Instruction will be given in the Polka, the Valse, Mazurka, Lancers, and Cotillons, and in other elegant dances at present fashionable in the highest circles and assemblies and by Royal Patronage.

"Mamma," said Isobel at breakfast one morning, "do you not think that I ought to take lessons in dancing? Now that I have come out it seems very absurd not to make a good figure in the ballroom, and I was positively ashamed at Lady Amersham's dance the other night because I went all wrong in the cotillon. Even Arthur could not help laughing at me."

Lady Alderton glanced nervously at his lordship, who was reading some letters.

"I am afraid Papa does not approve of dancing," she said. "And after all you received instruction in Deportment from Mr. D'Egville."

"What is that?" asked his lordship. "Did I hear you say something about dancing?"

Lady Alderton explained the matter. It certainly was embarrassing to poor Isobel, she said, that she should not be able to take her place properly in a cotillon or the lancers. It certainly might be a good thing if she joined some classes attended by young people of her own social standing.

"I object to dancing," said his lordship. "I regard the valse especially as disgusting and indecent, and the polka is merely a vulgar romp. No, Isobel, I am afraid I cannot allow you to take lessons in a form of amusement which I consider contrary to the teaching of Scripture and very dangerous to the virtue of English womanhood. I am sorry to appear strict, but those are my views."

"But, Papa," argued Isobel, "surely you do not wish me to look foolish in public? Arthur dances divinely, and I know you have a high opinion of his moral character. If one does not clasp one's partner too tightly even the valse is quite harmless. Then, too, the Royal Family do not set their face against it. The Prince Consort danced with the Queen many times at State Balls. Surely if the Queen approves . . . ?"

That was a formidable argument. Not even Lord Alderton could continue to denounce the immorality of an exercise which was allowed by Queen Victoria, for whom he had the greatest reverence and loyalty as the ideal of womanhood.

He hesitated, weakened, and gave way.

"Perhaps I am over-scrupulous and old-fashioned. As long as the classes are conducted by respectable instructors and attended by gentlefolk, I am prepared to withdraw my objection."

Isobel read out the advertisement of Mrs. Bland and the Misses Bland of Portland Place.

"That is where Arthur learnt to dance so well," she said. "All the best people have learnt their steps from Mrs. Bland and her daughters. It is quite a famous establishment, Papa."

"Of course you will take Miss Venables," he said grudgingly.

"Oh, of course. And I hope to persuade Richard to come too."

"Very well, then, my dear."

It was a great victory. Isobel announced the glad tidings to Venny and in the privacy of her room dashed off a note to Kate Verney, asking her whether by any possible chance she could persuade her brother Harry to join her in taking a course of dancing lessons at Mrs. Bland's Academy in Portland Place.

"It is only two guineas for the season," she wrote, "and it would be delightful if you and your brother could come and make a party of four with me and my brother Richard, who is anxious to meet you both. I do not count Miss Venables, my lady companion, who will act as chaperon. Please, please do give me this very great pleasure. We could have the greatest possible fun."

It will be seen that Isobel was laying her plans for an escape now and then from the narrow confines of her father's social and moral horizon, and that the Verneys were to be the link between the two worlds into which she divided life. In one world was High Society, with its wealth, its etiquette, its rank and fashion, its very strict proprieties, at least in outward

observance ; in the other the freedom of Middle Class people who were interested in plays and books and painting and poetry, and all that stood for romance and loveliness in the imagination of this girl.

Yet I should be wrong if I suggested that Isobel revolted against the luxury and grandeur of her own home life, or despised its pleasures and privileges. To be surrounded by every comfort was to her a natural and unnoticeable thing. To be waited on hand and foot by maids and servants of all kinds at Alderton House in Surrey and Belgrave Square in Town did not seem to her objectionable or oppressive. She took all that for granted. She liked riding in the Row every morning with her father and Richard, and meeting Arthur Mannington and other friends who cantered past on lovely horses, while the railings were lined with young gentlemen in tall hats above their curls and whiskers, with red-coated soldiers and pretty nursemaids and respectable young mothers, who gazed at the riding parties with smiling eyes. She liked driving with her mother to receptions in Eaton Square and Grosvenor Square, to Dorchester House and Sutherland House, where red carpets were laid down under striped awnings and rows of footmen bowed as the guests entered, to crowd up the marble staircases where some lovely hostess stood smiling upon distinguished gentlemen who bowed over her gloved hand.

All that was amusing and delightful, especially as Arthur Mannington, with the spiritual face of a young knight—Sir Galahad—was so often in the same assembly and quick to come to her side for a laughing conversation, or whispered comments on the people around them, or a confidential talk about his ambitions and ideals.

Other young men of rank paid homage to her, and blushed absurdly when she teased them, although, perhaps, they were officers in the Guards or hard riders in the hunting-field. In their shyness they fastened and unfastened their white gloves, stroked their whiskers nervously, and cried, "Oh, Lady Isobel!" when she said something a little audacious. Others, older and bolder, ogled her through monocles, called her "dear young lady", made love to her shamelessly, and were annoyed when she laughed at them. One of that kind, named Lord Ernest Woldingham, of whom Richard told some scandalous stories—it appeared he kept a mistress in Maida Vale—lured her into a conservatory at the Duke of Portland's house and, after some foolish conversation in which he said that he was a wretched

man much in need of a woman's love and understanding, declared that she inspired him with a burning passion and kissed her on the bare arm above her long glove. She hit him across the face with her fan and called him Beast. He had been drinking, and not only did his breath smell abominably of brandy, but his eyes were watery with excess of alcohol.

"Damn you, my dear!" he said. "Is that how you behave to a man who declares his love to you? By Jove, I call that most infernally cruel. I believe you've drawn blood from me, dammit."

It was true, and when he put his hand up to his face his glove was stained with blood from a scratch inflicted by Isobel's fan, which had broken one of its ribs.

"It is a lesson to you, Lord Ernest," said Isobel calmly. "Kindly remember that I do not live in Maida Vale."

Those words startled and astonished him, but after staring at her for a moment with drink-inflamed eyes, he laughed carelessly.

"I thought you were a little innocent," he said. "You modern girls know a damn sight too much!"

Fortunately Arthur came into the conservatory with one of his sisters, and Isobel turned her back on the objectionable young man, who retired hurt.

Such an incident stood alone, and, apart from that solitary episode, Isobel had no complaint against the manners of her own crowd. But the other world called to her with a different appeal. It was an adventure when she went into a little house like the one in Royal Avenue, where people lived with only one servant, and waited on themselves, and were shabby and poor and intellectual, and free in their ideas and manners. It was like going behind the scenes and meeting the characters of Charles Dickens, or George Eliot, in real life. Now that she had seen *Caste* she had a warm sympathy for people not very well to do. She was becoming Liberal like Arthur. Even as a child she had wanted to talk to people whom Venny called "the Lower Orders". She had talked to a gipsy boy who had snatched a kiss from her before he was hanged—some years later—one morning outside Newgate. . . . Then there was Harry . . . David Copperfield. . . . She liked him tremendously.

XXI

ISOBEL was delighted when her brother Richard came down from Oxford and occupied his usual room in the Belgrave Square house. But she did not see so much of him as she wished. He had his own friends and insisted upon living his own life as far as possible under his father's roof, where he was still subject to parental discipline. Even when he was at home he retired mostly to his own "den", as he called it, in order to avoid too much contact with his father, who was apt to cross-examine him as to his movements and to rebuke him for disorderly behaviour, lack of reverence for sacred subjects, and an overdose of original sin.

His lordship, of course, did not allow smoking in the dining-room, or in any room used by himself or the ladies, so that Richard, who had contracted this habit at Oxford, retired to his den immediately after dinner, partly as an excuse to avoid parental monologues. Here, upstairs, he put on a costume considered necessary at that time for the devotees of tobacco—a heavily padded jacket lined with silk and decorated with military "frogs", a round cap with a gold tassel, and embroidered slippers. His walls were hung with photographs of fellow undergraduates with a precocious amount of hair on their faces, and various sporting prints. Over the mantelpiece was the car with which he had helped to win a famous race at Henley between Balliol and Christ Church. A pair of boxing-gloves and some Indian clubs lay on the bookcase, which contained some of the classical authors whom he had sadly neglected to read, with sets of novels by Dickens, Thackeray and Sir Walter Scott, handsomely bound in calf, and a complete edition of Byron's Poems given him as a birthday present by Isobel and still uncut.

With a good fire burning in the grate and the lighted gas jets glinting upon the gold work of a Japanese screen, and on the polished mahogany of a heavy table where he kept a decanter of port ready for any friends who might call in, the room was very snug and cosy, and Isobel delighted to slip into this retreat

for comradely talks while he smoked his pipe with the gravity of a Turkish Pasha.

At such times they exchanged confidences, discussed life, which was made so much more difficult, they thought, by parental discipline and social conventions, and revealed to each other a rebel instinct which would have alarmed and shocked their noble father had he overheard them. It was by such conversations that Isobel learnt more about life than young ladies of her age and caste were supposed to know, and there were times when even she was shocked by revelations which Richard let slip with brotherly candour and carelessness.

As yet he had not decided upon his future career, but inclined towards the Grenadier Guards as a gentlemanly occupation not requiring too much intellectual exertion.

"But supposing there is a war, Richard? You might get killed!"

Richard envisaged this possibility of death with heroic composure.

"*'Dulce et decorum est . . .'*" he quoted.

Both his character and his inclinations were a source of annoyance to his father. Certainly his career at the University had been far from brilliant, and he was nearly sent down for riotous conduct. But for his father's name this disgrace would have befallen him without any doubt, as he frankly confessed one evening to Isobel when she sat on his bearskin rug before the fire, with her hands clasped about her knees and her head leaning against his sofa—in an attitude which would have called forth an instant reproof from her mother.

"The fact is," he said, with amused reminiscence, "I became slightly inebriated one night and locked the landlord of the Mitre in his own wine-cellar, because he had the dashed insolence to say I was drunk."

"I hope you were *not* drunk, Richard," said Isobel, loyal but doubtful.

"Certainly I was! But I wasn't going to be told so by a fat publican. Everything would have been perfectly all right if some fellows hadn't attracted attention by singing music-hall ballads and throwing pewter plates out of the window at passing undergraduates. Needless to say, the bulldogs arrived, and by the worst possible luck I tapped the claret of one of the progs who happened to have a downer on me."

Isobel had no need to ask for an interpretation of this University slang, which by this time was familiar to her. But

she felt called upon to express a sisterly disapproval of such disorderly conduct.

"Richard, really, I think you were dreadful. Why, a butcher's boy couldn't have behaved worse than that!"

Richard laughed, and poured himself out a glass of port, holding it up against the light to see its ruby glow.

"My dear child, it all depends how these things are done. When a butcher's boy gets drunk—on foul beer—it's disgusting. When a gentleman gets drunk it's amusing. Personally, the more I drink the better I behave. After six glasses of port I'm a regular Sir Charles Grandison, or like one of our ancestors in the time of perukes and lace ruffles. 'Gadzooks, ma'am, I am your very humble and obedient servant to command. Shall we dance a fandango or a minuet?'"

Isobel slapped his hand as he put it over her shoulder to play with her coral necklace.

"Really, Richard," she exclaimed, "I am afraid you may become a rake like our great uncle Jocelyn, who gambled so much at White's and had a terrible reputation as a ladies' man. Aunt Louisa told me all about him one day until Mamma begged her to desist."

"Oh, he kept a mistress or two," said Richard carelessly. "Lots of men do even now, you know. Like our friend Lord Ernest."

He referred to a lady whom they often saw in the Row, riding alone as a rule on a good-looking hack. She was always dressed in a green habit, with a Di Vernon hat, and the ladies all looked the other way when she passed, though some of the gentlemen raised their hats if they were riding without their wives. Isobel had asked about her one day, and her father had avoided a direct answer and said something about "a notorious creature".

"She is the mistress of the Duke of Beaufort," said Richard. "I must say he knows a pretty lady when he sees one. Vastly attractive, don't you think?"

"She must be exceedingly wicked," said Isobel. "I do not think you ought to admire her, Richard."

He told her other stories of a very scandalous nature about some of the gentlemen whom they met at great houses.

Isobel listened open-eyed and with flushed cheeks. She was very glad that no one could overhear this conversation.

"But, Richard," she said, "surely Papa does not know these things? You know how strict he is. He would not ask

gentlemen to his dinner-table—with dear Mamma—if they led immoral lives with dreadful women.”

Richard shrugged his shoulders.

“I don’t suppose the governor enquires too closely into the private lives of all his political friends. Otherwise he would have to live like a hermit. As long as they are discreet and don’t make a scandal there’s nothing to be said, although I admit that he bars out any notorious scamp. . . . And by the by, Isobel, you’re old enough to know a thing or two. If you happen to meet me anywhere with a nice-looking girl, don’t get fussed if I don’t seem to see you. That’s a sign I don’t want to introduce the lady. She may be some little shop-girl I’m taking round a bit. See?”

Isobel stared into the fire as though trying to see more clearly.

“Richard,” she said gravely, “I hope you are not becoming dissolute. It would break Mamma’s heart, you know, and Papa would never forgive you. I am all for liberty, but I should hate to think”

Richard saw, perhaps, that he had gone too far with these confidences. He was startled to see a look of alarm in his sister’s eyes, although he had believed that she was as much a rebel against parental narrowness as he was himself.

“It’s perfectly harmless,” he assured her. “It’s just a way of studying life and all that. Some of these girls are quite virtuous and respectable, and friends of fellows I know. Not our class, certainly! But one doesn’t want to be snobbish. It’s amusing to take a girl or two to tea at Ranelagh or on the river at Maidenhead. Not alone, of course! I’m not such a fool as that. But with a party of fellows—out for a spree. I assure you it’s all as innocent as a Mothers’ Meeting!”

She believed him and put her arm round his shoulder as he jumped up from the sofa and stood with his back to the fireplace.

“I am not narrow-minded, Richard,” she told him. “And I quite agree with studying the life of the Middle Classes—and even the Lower Classes, if one can get in touch with them. That is why I am so interested in Harry and Kate Verney, you know. But I do not want my handsome brother to get into trouble or disgrace. I quite see there is no harm in joining a merry party at Ranelagh or somewhere, so long as they are respectable and nice.”

“That’s exactly what I mean,” said Richard, much relieved by this sisterly understanding.

But he was disconcerted by her next remark, made with an innocence and eagerness which were unaffected.

"Do you think I might come with you to Ranelagh one evening—with some of your friends? It must be extremely amusing."

Richard coloured up and burst out laughing.

"Good heavens, no! My dear Isobel, how utterly absurd you are! A real lady can't go to Ranelagh nowadays. The Governor would have an apoplectic stroke if he knew you had been there."

It was extremely difficult to reconcile his statements. At first he said everything was perfectly respectable and that the girls who went with him were innocent and virtuous. Now he said that no lady could go there.

"I'm a man and you're a girl," he said when she pointed out this discrepancy. "It makes a lot of difference, and if you don't understand, I can't explain it to you, my dear."

"Well, one of these days I shall go to Ranelagh and see for myself," she warned him.

She was surprised when he became angry and alarmed.

"Isobel! I'm shocked at you! I don't pretend to be a saint or anything like that, but I would never speak to you again if you went to such a place."

"But you speak to girls who go there, Richard!"

"They're not my sister," he said stiffly.

She did not continue the argument. She had already discovered that on some subjects it was impossible to argue with men, if her father and brother were average specimens of manhood. Even Arthur shirked the issues if she became too closely inquisitive. All men, except Harry Verney, perhaps, despised the intelligence of women and tried to keep them in the dark, or treated them like children. There were things they were not supposed to know, very important things about life. There were things they were not supposed to *think*. Even Arthur smiled in a superior way when she tried to discuss politics with him too deeply, as one day when she had tried to draw him out on the subject of disestablishing the Irish Church, which appeared to be arousing furious passions in the nation, and to threaten the political career of Mr. Disraeli.

Young women of her class were supposed to be charming, to show an intelligent interest in the affairs of men, but not more than a ladylike curiosity, to simper, and smile, and be demure or innocently gay. And yet she had read ever so much more

than Richard, and wanted to know life as it really was and not as it could be seen from a drawing-room in Belgrave Square or through the window of a closed brougham.

It was after this particular conversation with Richard that she asked him to join her in the dancing classes at Mrs. Bland's rooms in Portland Place, and somewhat to her surprise he agreed willingly enough, especially when she told him that Kate Verney might come.

"The little actress girl?" he asked. "Pretty, isn't she?"

He was pleased with the idea of meeting an actress off the stage, as though she might be delightfully dangerous.

XXII

THE entry of Isobel into the life of Harry Verney—it is more true to say that their lives touched at times—was disturbing to the mind and work of that young man, as once he told her, not without emotion. It is difficult for us now, in this age of realism and easy familiarity between young men and women, to put ourselves back into the time of our fathers' love affairs—your grandfather's time, my younger readers—and to understand their attitude of mind towards the fair sex, and especially towards the particular young woman of their worship. They were incurable romantics. They idealized the pretty Miss who stirred their first passion. They invested her with qualities never possessed by any living girl this side of sanctity.

It was impossible for them to believe, or at least to admit, that the lady they adored could have the slightest stain of human frailty. Her virtue, her spiritual purity, her unselfishness, her pity and compassion and tenderness and grace were beyond question. She was immune, they thought, from the passions and appetites of men. She was disembodied in their imagination to such an extent that she was often extremely uncomfortable in their presence. It never occurred to them that a beautiful woman might feel hungry, might even be tempted by a little greediness, might be in need of ordinary human conveniences. As soon as men fell in love they lost their common sense and their humour.

One can jeer at them. There has been a lot of laughter at their expense. Yet I honestly believe that they were sincere, and that this romantic love was touched at times with a divine fire which somehow we have lost, or, perhaps, think we have lost. Harry Verney, quite an ordinary young man, apart from a streak of literary talent, became uplifted and ennobled by his vision of Isobel. She seemed to him the most beautiful creature alive, and that sense of beauty awakened by her gave a new radiance to life itself, so that he became more aware of the sunshine over the roofs of Royal Avenue, Chelsea, with its glint

on door-knockers and the harness of cab-horses and area railings.

Night took on a new loveliness when he walked down by the river at Chelsea, seeing the silver streak of a new moon along the inky waterway, and hearing the whisper of leaves in the plane trees, and the klip-klop of a horse as a hansom cab, the gondola of London, came out of Tite Street or Cheyne Row. Life seemed to offer so much more now that he had seen Isobel Ingleby. It was not so drab as he had thought it sometimes. It was richer in colour and drama. He had even a higher opinion of God—after grave doubts about the existence of a Divine Being, due to Darwin and other scientists—and was certain now that there must be a very good God, because Isobel existed in the world. He felt more pity for unhappiness, more sympathy with misery, more ambition to do good work for humanity, now that this exquisite lady had appeared on his horizon.

Am I making up all this? Is it just the sort of stuff that novelists write, and that Harry wrote in his own novels and plays? No, I am certain that the letters he wrote to Isobel, somewhat later than I have yet reached in this narrative, told the truth about his emotions and thoughts. He did actually think those things. He was inspired by that sense of wonderment and delight. He did have a humble and chivalrous adoration of her. I have read those letters lately, greatly touched. Could they be written now by any young lover? I should like to think so. Yet I doubt whether such letters are now written, with such simplicity and passionate devotion. The modern girl would laugh at them. She would not stand for them, knowing that she could not live up to such homage, or balance herself with any sense of safety on such a pedestal.

From his own family he tried to hide the thing that had happened to him—this love which had made things different. Mrs. Verney and his sister Kate only guessed that he was a little smitten with the girl whom Kate had nicknamed "Lady Isobel of the Moated Grange". They did not know that when he finished his writing after supper and declared that he must get a bit of fresh air, he walked always to Belgrave Square, to stare up at a lighted window where he guessed Isobel might sleep, while he stood in the shelter of the trees above the garden, beyond the light of the nearest gas lamp. He never told them that one night he saw the door of her house open and that he had a glimpse of her with her hand on her brother's arm before she stepped into a carriage with the Alderton crest on the polished

panels. She was in a white frock as soft as sea foam, with bare shoulders and arms. Two flunkeys stood to open and shut the carriage door. She did not see a tall young man standing in the shadow, with all his soul in his eyes. . . .

Kate and he went to those dances at Mrs. Bland's Academy in Portland Place. At least, they went to several of them before Kate had a new engagement and Isobel had to cut them short for other reasons. Of course he felt a fool at first, as he told his mother and Kate, who accused him of being sulky and unsociable.

He had had to order an evening suit, which was vastly expensive to a young man who picked up a few guineas now and then from odd articles. He cursed it with an extreme violence of which he was afterwards ashamed, because the tailor had made it tight under the arms with a crease across the shoulders at the back, as he had observed by nearly cricking his neck to look at it in his bedroom glass.

His cry of agony was so acute that Kate came running into his room in her petticoat.

"Harry, what on earth's the matter? 'Why dost thou wring thy hands?' in the words of the immortal Bard."

"Satan take this tailor!" groaned Harry. "Why do you insist upon dragging me out to social affairs, when I can't afford to dress decently? It's all your fault, Kate."

"Stuff and nonsense!" said Kate. "It's a lovely suit, Harry. You look like Byron at his best."

Secretly he had inked over a split on his patent shoes, but was dreadfully conscious of it all through the evening at the dancing class, especially when Isobel presented him to her brother Richard, whose clothes were flawless and superb, and who looked Harry up and down with a slightly quizzical smile, though afterwards he was quite friendly and free from snobbishness.

The dancing class would have been ridiculous but for the presence of Isobel. Mrs. Bland was tremendously stout, and it was really an embarrassment to see the folds of flesh which exuded from a very tight bodice, although she was feather light on her feet. The Misses Bland, on the contrary, were young women of extreme scragginess, and were over-coy in their manners, simpering and ogling the young gentlemen who had taken tickets for their classes, and putting their arms round the waists of the young ladies.

On the first night Mrs. Bland made a speech to the assembled pupils.

"My lords, ladies and gentlemen, it is with the very greatest pleasure that I welcome you here to-night, at the beginning of this session. My dear daughters and I will do our very best to give you instruction without discomfort, and enjoyment without inelegance. We are making a very special feature of the new valse and the cotillon. As everyone here belongs to the Nobility and Gentry, I trust there will be no social stiffness and that very pleasant friendships will be formed before we separate. Your dear chaperons will, I am sure, approve of the moral atmosphere which pervades these classes, and I wish to inform them that light refreshment, including lemonade and sandwiches, will be served between the dances. My dear daughter Hermione will preside at the pianoforte and my dear daughter Eunice will be particularly attentive to gentlemen who may be diffident as beginners. We will now commence with the polka. Hermione, darling, take your place at the pianoforte. Ladies and gentlemen—begging your pardon—*my lords*, ladies, and gentlemen—kindly choose your partners and point your toes."

Richard Ingleby bowed very low to Kate Verney and said, "May I have the pleasure?"

"Charmed, I'm sure," said Kate, as cool as a cucumber, and very much amused with herself in a rose-pink frock with little bows on the shoulders and a wreath of rosebuds on her hair.

Harry approached Isobel, who was sitting next to Miss Venables. She awaited his coming and smiled up at him.

"Dare I ask you?" he said. "I'm no dancer."

"Nor I," she answered, rising instantly. "My Papa has kept me ignorant of the art. Isn't that dreadful? But then he is Evangelical, you know. . . . I daresay we shall be able to get round somehow."

(Oh, that split in the patent leather shoe. What a fool he had been to risk it!)

"It seems simple enough, looking on," said Harry incautiously, with a glance at Kate, who was speeding by like a sylph in the arms of Richard.

It was not quite so simple as it looked. Twice he trod on his partner's toe and wished the earth would open and swallow him leaving a gap at her feet.

"We are getting on wonderfully," said Isobel. "Have you written anything lately?"

"Not very much. Just a short story or two."

"A short story or two? How marvellous that sounds! I do envy you your imagination and genius."

He blushed at the enormity of these words.

"Genius! I have no genius, I'm afraid. Only literary aspirations like thousands of others."

"Will you send me something you have written? I should be very proud if you would."

"Why proud?"

"To know the author of it. Please let me be proud!"

"Perhaps you won't like what I write. It's great rubbish."

"Oh, I do not believe it. I can see that you do not write rubbish. It is because you are modest about your own work."

"I say, I'm frightfully sorry! But we're all out of time, and it's my fault."

"No, it is my fault!" said Isobel. "I forgot we were dancing. My tongue was too busy."

"Ladies, ladies!" cried Mrs. Bland, clapping her hands. "This is getting disorderly. Time, please, time! One—two—three! One—two—three! Keep the beat! Point your toes, Lord Lovelace. Hold yourself straight, Lady Marjorie. Don't grab your partner, Mr. Widgery. Elegance! Elegance! The polka is a free, graceful and refined step—not a stampede of wild beasts!"

She laughed with the greatest merriment, which threatened to burst her bodice.

"Mr. Verney," she commanded presently, "let me take you round once or twice. I am sure you will be one of our very best dancers. I see you have it in your soul. But just a little tuition, if you please. Just a slight respect for technique, you know!"

She held him against her bosom, clutched his hand tightly and warmly, pranced about the polished boards with him.

"Be bold!" she said in his ear. "Each step must be like the prance of a gallant horse, wild and free, and yet with dignity and grace. Lift up your head as though breathing in the zephyrs of the open moors. Do not be afraid of your feet."

He was afraid of his feet. He was horribly afraid of his right foot. He quaked with terror lest the split should widen and shame him before Isobel.

"One—two—three! One—two—three!" chanted Mrs. Bland with rhythmic ecstasy as she whirled him round the room. He felt himself getting dizzy. A lock of hair had fallen over his temple. The large lady in whose arms he lay seemed to

envelop him. When she at last released him he staggered back exhausted and perturbed. But she had taught him how to dance the polka.

Isobel had deserted him for some young fop to whom he took an unreasoning and almost murderous dislike. They were drinking lemonade next to Miss Venables, her chaperon. Richard Ingleby was talking to Kate Verney.

"It must be awfully jolly to be an actress. Don't you have a giddy time, Miss Kate?"

"Oh, it's very hard work, I assure you," said Kate. "Don't imagine actresses have time to get giddy."

"You astonish me!" said Richard. "I always imagined that they were—well, a little playful, as you might say."

"Your mistake," replied Kate. "Most people think so who have never been behind the stage."

"Do you think I might call for you at the stage door one night? I should be delighted to take you out to supper."

"It's very kind of you," said Kate coldly; "but my mother always calls for me and I have supper at home. Generally some toasted cheese and strong tea."

Richard was obviously disconcerted.

"Well, that's most disappointing," he said. "Don't you think you could give your mother the slip one night?"

"Certainly not," said Kate severely, "and I am astonished that you make any such suggestion."

"Oh, I say, I'm terribly sorry! Forgive me, Miss Verney. I had no idea——"

"I forgive you," said Kate, holding out her hand.

She recited some lines from her favourite author.

". . . they may seize
On the white wonder of dear Juliet's hand,
And steal immortal blessing from her lips;
Who, even in pure and vestal modesty . . ."

Richard was astounded by this sudden outburst, and then realized that she was teasing him, at least partly. He lifted her hand to his lips, regardless of Miss Hermione Bland, who looked somewhat perturbed.

"Thank you," said Kate demurely. "And now I think I will drink a glass of lemonade."

Harry Verney, according to his own description, written later, suffered alternate emotions of agony and ecstasy at these

dancing lessons. He became fiercely jealous of the young man with the pale gold hair, who happened to be Lord Ernest Frampton and was much attracted by Isobel.

"It's only natural that she should like one of her own set," he thought. "I'm simply like a damned ridiculous moth singeing himself in the candle-light. I've no business here at all. I belong to Grub Street. These people are not my people. Isobel belongs to another world in which I have no place. Fool that I am to look through the open door like a ragamuffin staring through the area railings of a house in Belgrave Square."

"Why do you look so sulky?" whispered Kate one evening. "Tummy-ache or something?"

It was heart-ache because Lord Ernest Frampton was monopolizing Isobel. She did not think Harry Verney looked sulky. She thought he looked thoughtful and poetical as he stood with his back to the folding doors, staring at the Wedgwood pattern of the dado.

He agonized because he spilt a glass of lemonade over Miss Eunice Bland when he was carrying it to Isobel. It was a *faux pas* of the first magnitude, and made him seem like a clumsy lout. All the others laughed, and Miss Eunice tried to make a joke of it, though perhaps he had ruined a frock which she could ill afford owing to the low fees charged to the Nobility and Gentry for all her tripping and prancing.

There were times when for decency's sake and human kindness he had to talk to Miss Venables and other chaperons when he was aching to hold converse with Isobel, who had forgotten all about him (he thought) in the vivacious company of a group of young men with oily whiskers.

Miss Venables, dressed in black silk with sequins and jet, showed him a locket containing a tress of her mother's hair, and among other subjects which interested her enquired anxiously whether he happened to know a gentleman named Mr. Thorpe, who had literary tastes and might have taken a position in Fleet Street.

"I sometimes think," she said wistfully, "that he may be writing the leading articles in *The Times*. They are often remarkably like his cast of mind and political views—rather too Liberal to be approved by Lord Alderton, in whose household I have the honour to be."

Harry Verney listened with apparent patience, and assured Miss Venables that he had never met or even heard of Mr. Thorpe. Certainly he would make enquiries in Fleet Street. In his own

mind he cursed his fate in having to sit and suffer this kind of thing politely while Isobel was receiving the attentions of arrogant young puppies on the other side of the room.

There were other moments when he was raised to the seventh heaven. One of them was when Isobel told him that she had read one of his short stories—*The Impatient Lover*—and had wept and laughed over it. She thought it revealed a genius second only to that of Mr. Dickens. Another was when she told him that she preferred dancing with him rather than with any other gentleman in the room because he had such a sense of rhythm, especially in the waltz.

"It makes it quite dreamlike," she said, and laughed when he said, "Not a nightmare, I hope!"

The most wonderful of all moments happened at the last of the five dances, when she told him that she would weep on the way home because she would not be able to dance with him again for some time now that Kate had obtained another engagement, and she herself and Richard were going into the country for a few weeks.

"You will dance with other men," said Harry gloomily. "Men of your own social set. I'm an outsider, you know. A fellow from Grub Street!"

He spoke with irony and bitterness, but she did not notice the tone of his voice.

"You and I suit each other," she said. "Even Mrs. Bland remarks how well we dance together. Have I bored you with my chatter? Do you want to think out plots and ideas while I enjoy myself like a schoolgirl?"

"How can you think that?" he asked. "I'm glad you haven't found me too bad a partner."

"Oh, Harry," she whispered, "you are far too modest! But I love you for it. Most young men are so conceited, I find."

Harry Verney turned quite pale at that word "love". Of course she meant nothing by it, except kindness. She was being kind to him, he thought, because he was poor and shabby and ill at ease among these young lordlings and Society girls.

XXIII

It was at Alderton House in Surrey, where Isobel spent a few weeks after the dancing classes, that Arthur, Viscount Mannington, spoke to her very seriously about his future. He had come down from town to stay from Saturday to Monday—they did not use the term "week-end" in those days—before presenting himself to the free and independent electors of Amersham as a candidate for Parliament in the coming election. There was hardly a doubt that he would take his seat in the House of Commons on the Liberal side without undue exertion of oratory and persuasiveness. He proposed to make one speech on the public hustings, proclaiming his adherence to Mr. Gladstone, his views on the Disestablishment of the Church in Ireland, and his political convictions regarding the glorious destiny of an educated Democracy.

Owing to the fact that the free and independent electors of Amersham were mostly in the service of the Earl of Amersham, as gardeners, grooms, gamekeepers, and tradesmen who provided Amersham House with its meat, groceries, coal and other necessities of a great household—their wives receiving gifts at Christmas from her ladyship, who also took an interest in their newborn babies, their dying grandmothers, and their own ailments—it was unlikely that they would vote against their loyalty to the family and their own interests.

It is true that most of them had voted Tory at previous elections, but when Arthur explained to them, as he intended to do, the need for a more Liberal outlook now that Democracy was on the march, he anticipated little difficulty in securing their votes. The franchise had been increased by Mr. Disraeli's Government, under pressure of public opinion—in addition to a few riots—but this was expected to favour the prospects of Mr. Gladstone rather than his political rival, who had yielded under the compulsion of Liberal—and Radical—attacks.

After dinner on the Saturday evening Arthur sat longer at table than usual with Isobel's father ; and Lady Alderton, who

was anxious to play a game of whist, became a little perturbed by the passage of time.

"I cannot think why Papa lingers so long at table," she said to Isobel. "I am afraid Arthur may have drawn him into a political argument which may lead to heated words. Papa is extremely opposed to Disestablishment, and, in spite of his affection for Arthur, cannot understand how a young man of his intelligence and character can possibly bring himself to support Mr. Gladstone."

Isobel laughed as she turned over some music at the piano-forte.

"Papa refuses to move with the times. One of these days he will realize that people's minds have changed since the days of Queen Anne."

Lady Alderton, who was setting out the cards on the baize-covered table, was not quite pleased with these words.

"Is not that rather disrespectful, darling?"

"I did not intend it to be, Mamma. But you must admit that Papa is terribly old-fashioned and rooted in tradition. England is no longer living under the feudal system. Besides, Papa is *very* intolerant. He never admits that other people may think rather differently from himself without committing a mortal sin or being utterly abandoned."

Lady Alderton lit one of the candles on the card-table before answering in a troubled voice.

"Isobel, my dear, I do not like to hear you criticize your father like that. It is not the first time lately. I notice that both you and Richard are apt to be impatient when Papa expresses his wishes to you. He told me, for instance, how you argued with him about going to the theatre. It quite upset him. After all, Isobel, he knows best about these things. I am older than you, but I would not dare to contradict him or vex him by holding different opinions about moral problems and behaviour."

"Poor Mamma!" cried Isobel. "What a dreadful life you must have had all these years, always submitting to Papa's commands, never having an opinion of your own, always going in fear and trembling of a husband who forgets that you are still young and beautiful!"

Isobel could never understand what induced her to speak such words, unless some unconscious rebellion in her heart—perhaps due to her disobedience about the theatre—suddenly surged up and made her tongue wag wantonly. She could

have bitten off that tongue when she saw the effect of her words.

Lady Alderton became very pale. She had risen from the card-table and put both her hands to her breast, as though something hurt her there.

"Isobel!" she cried. "How dare you say such dreadful things! Have I ever suggested by a single word that I have been unhappy with Papa?"

Isobel left the piano-stool and fled across the room to put her arm round Lady Alderton's waist.

"Forgive me, Mamma! I did not mean to hurt you. The words just slipped out."

Lady Alderton suddenly began to weep quite passionately, and it was the first time Isobel had ever seen her shed more than a little tear at some sentimental verse or story. It was distressing, this sudden releasing of tears, not justified, surely, by Isobel's thoughtless and careless words.

"She has been unhappy," thought Isobel. "Papa has broken her spirit all these years when perhaps she wanted romance and love as I do, and a little freedom from so much Duty."

"Mamma," she whispered, "I cannot say how sorry I am. Do please forgive me. You have been a saint to Papa and me."

Lady Alderton dried her tears on one of those tiny lace-edged handkerchiefs which were really not large enough for such a purpose.

"I am ashamed of myself," she said, turning her face away. "Play something, Isobel, before the gentlemen come up. I could never pardon myself if they were to see such silly emotion—for no reason at all."

Isobel went to the pianoforte again and played one of Mendelssohn's "Songs Without Words", while her mother furtively repaired the damage of her tears.

It was then that his lordship came up with Arthur, both looking rather grave and preoccupied.

"Won't you sing something?" asked Arthur presently, as Isobel played her last chord and looked above the music-stand to smile at him, with one glance at her mother, who had recovered her outward composure and pretended to be busy with one of the candlewicks.

"Any choice, Arthur?"

He chose "She Wore a Wreath of Roses", and came to stand by her side while she sang it.

"Exquisite," he said when she had ended, "but terribly

sad. Perhaps all beautiful things are touched with a little sadness."

"Oh, I hope not!" laughed Isobel. "That is a *very* melancholy thought, Arthur. Are you feeling that way to-night? You look a little Byronic."

She was covering up her mother's emotion, giving her time to regain her placid demeanour.

"I am feeling more than usually happy," he answered in a low voice, though why he dropped his voice she could not guess, unless it was that he was uplifted by the thought of fighting an election in the Liberal interest and did not wish to mention it in the presence of her Papa.

"Have you been talking politics, Arthur?" asked Lady Alderton in a perfectly normal voice.

("What actresses we women are!" thought Isobel.)

"That and other things," answered Arthur with his usual charming deference to all ladies.

"The politics were the least pleasant part of our conversation," said his lordship. "I have been telling Arthur that I shall never bring myself to approve of his enlisting in the Liberal Party. I regard it as next door to High Treason, don't I, Arthur, my boy?"

Isobel was astonished at the mildness of her father's tone. He even laughed and laid a hand heavily but affectionately on Arthur's shoulder, as though he were tolerant of a young man's folly. Never before had he spoken so lightly of his political convictions. There was something peculiar about him this evening. As he passed Isobel's Mamma on the way to the card-table he stooped down for a moment and kissed her hair. For one wild moment Isobel wondered if by any dreadful chance he had overheard the words she had spoken about her mother living in fear and trembling of him. But that was impossible. The drawing-room door had been shut. He did not grumble even about taking part in a game of whist or utter his usual warnings about the folly of card-playing, which he only tolerated on the strict condition that it should not be for money.

When Isobel revoked in an absent-minded moment she expected some stern reproof or ironical comment. But she was abashed when he laughed and spoke in quite a jocular way to Arthur.

"Isobel has no head for whist, Arthur. Her spirit is not in the game, for which, personally, I do not blame her."

What mildness! What good nature! Isobel was really

astonished, and looked at him anxiously. Perhaps Papa was ill, she thought. Perhaps he was going to die or something. But Arthur only smiled at her and said, "Ladies are allowed to revoke at least once in an evening."

There was something strange about Arthur too. He looked more poetical even than usual. There was a shining light in his eyes. He was *distract*, restless, in a state of suppressed emotion.

"You have trumped one of my tricks, Arthur," said Isobel. "Is that a rebuke after my revoking?"

"This game is going to pieces!" cried Lady Alderton, who did not show by any slightest sign that a little while ago she had been much distressed.

XXIV

It was not until the next morning, before church, that Isobel knew what was the reason for this unusual behaviour of her father and her friend. It was a mild day, and Arthur suggested a stroll in the gardens.

"Perhaps a shawl would be well," he added. "This sunshine may conceal a sharp wind."

Isobel laughed at him.

"My dear Arthur, I decline to be coddled like that. I am a country-bred girl."

She slipped her hand through his arm, and as they walked out to the terrace from the French window:

"I'll race you to the end of the pergola!" she challenged, as when she had been six years younger and Arthur had come over from Eton with Richard.

But he wouldn't accept the challenge, and by a faint tone of reproach in his voice suggested that on a Sunday morning the servants might be shocked by such frolicsome behaviour.

"Besides," he said, "you forget that you are a grown-up lady, my dear."

"I like to forget it," she told him.

And then the remembrance of what had happened last night—her father's unusual good temper, that kiss on her mother's hair, and Arthur's shining eyes and restlessness, came back to her mind.

"Arthur," she asked, "what's the matter with you, and what has happened to Papa? Is it something in the air—the coming election, or some manifestation of heavenly grace?"

"Nothing like that," he answered with a kind of smiling gravity.

He told her what it was when they sat on a marble seat at the end of the pergola, looking down a grassy path between close-clipped hedges of yew.

"Isobel," he said, "last night I spoke to your father

about something I have very much in my mind and heart just now."

"The Liberal Party?" she asked. "Your political career, Arthur?"

"Bound up with that," he told her. "Much more important and romantic."

She hadn't the faintest idea what he was talking about. She was utterly surprised and abashed when he explained himself with more words than were really necessary to come to the point.

"Your father," he said, "was good enough to give me his views on the political situation, and of course I listened with great respect to an older man, and especially to a member of the House of Lords where one day I shall have to take my place. I am afraid I stated my own views rather too freely and emotionally. I stated the Liberal faith in what I am afraid was an absurdly boyish way. It almost makes me blush to think of it. But I am bound to say your father was extremely good-natured about it, especially when I begged him for the greatest favour that it would be possible to ask."

Isobel opened her eyes very wide and sat sideways so that she could see Arthur more clearly, and without having to turn her head.

"All this is very mysterious!" she exclaimed. "Do you want him to kiss Mr. Gladstone, or to break with Mr. Disraeli? Do you want him to address your electors on behalf of Fenians, Radicals, and the Rabble?"

Arthur took her hand and held it.

"Isobel, be serious!" he pleaded. "This is a very important conversation. Can you not guess, my dear? On the even of starting my political career I want to know that whatever duties it may bring me I may have the joy of knowing that I shall have the understanding and loyalty and love of one comrade. When I go into this political battle I want to feel like a knight who wears his lady's favour on his crest. Do you remember, Isobel, how we played the game of the knight and his lady when I was a shy schoolboy? I have never forgotten it. . . . I gave you my heart then. It is still yours, and will always be. I asked your father last night whether he would permit me to speak to you, to ask you to be my wife one day, and to share my life with me. I think you know I love you, my dear. I have never made a secret of that."

He took her hand and raised it to his lips very tenderly.

The bells of the village church were ringing and there was the hum of bees busy in Lady Alderton's herbaceous border. The sun of a June day slanted through the pergola and lay warm on Isobel's muslin frock. But she felt a sudden chill. Her hands went cold and she became pale.

"Oh, Arthur!" she cried.

Of course she loved him. She had had a great affection for him ever since he had come over for the first time with Richard from Eton. She had called him Sir Galahad, and was sure of his chivalry and nobility of mind. But the idea of marriage frightened her. She was not ready for marriage. She had "come out" only a little while, and there were so many things she wanted to see and do before she became a married woman. She wanted to have a little independence of her own, and to be free for private adventures among interesting people and in interesting places. If she married Arthur she would not be free. She would be like Mamma, tied to the responsibilities of her household, having servants to order about, seeing that everything worked smoothly for her lord and master. Arthur would be that. There were moments when he was just a little like Papa. Not so intolerant, of course, not so stern, but very high-minded and serious. She had shocked him when she wanted to race him down the pergola. He would be shocked and distressed if she confessed to that adventure in a hansom cab.

She would always have to be very well behaved if she married Arthur. He would want her to receive all his great friends, to play the hostess at the top of the stairs, to say the right thing to his political supporters. And she would want to say the wrong things, and to behave frivolously, and to laugh at the wrong time.

She would have to attend to his slightest wish, as Mamma did with Papa, and her own individuality would have to be lost in his life and career before she had had time to find out her own character and live anything of her own life.

In a few years, perhaps, she would be the Countess of Amersham, and a very great lady. She didn't want to be a very great lady for ever so long. She wanted to go to the Dress Circle again in a London theatre with Harry and Kate. She wanted to go to tea sometimes in Royal Avenue, Chelsea, and help Kate to wash up if the maid were out. She wanted to talk about novels and poetry with Harry Verney, who was a very poor young man, and rather shabby except at dancing classes. She liked poor young men and shabby young men, especially when they

were like Harry, so wonderfully good-looking and shy, and a genius.

All that kind of thing would be cut out of her life if she married Arthur. She would lose her girlhood, which was just beginning to be enchanting. She would have babies and become a wife and a mother before she was ready. Mamma had married when she was sixteen. She had never had any girlhood really. She had never belonged to herself, but always to other people, and to their ideals of Duty. Papa had crushed her with his moral weight. It would be dreadful to have everything that belonged to oneself crushed out by other people's ideas. . . .

It seems incredible that all those thoughts should pass through a girl's mind in just that second of time when she turned pale and cried out, "Oh, Arthur!" Yet the mind is like that, and all these things surged up from the subconsciousness of Isobel Ingleby and made her frightened.

"What do you say, darling Isobel?" asked Arthur, not in any desperate anxiety, but with a happy assurance that he was loved as he loved.

She plucked at the little white spots on her muslin frock.

"Arthur, of course you know I love you," she said; "but I do not want to get married just yet. In fact not for a long time. I hate the idea of it, somehow."

He assured her that he did not wish to rush her into marriage. On the contrary, he wanted to get the election well over and to take his place in Parliament before they made any definite arrangements for the wedding.

"Let us say six months, my dear," he suggested. "Of course I am happy beyond all words to know that you love me. That is the great thing. Isn't it wonderful to think that you and I are going through life together hand in hand, never separated, always sharing the same little troubles and joys?"

He took her hand again and put it between both of his and pressed it to his heart.

Isobel laughed nervously.

"But supposing we get tired of each other, Arthur? Will you not get bored sometimes, holding the same lady by the hand, and seeing her at breakfast as you saw her at dinner?"

"You are teasing me!" he protested. "The sun will drop out of the sky before I get tired of your beauty."

Young men in love do not talk like that nowadays. But in the reign of Queen Victoria, at least as far back as Mr. Disraeli's

time, they were not ashamed of expressing themselves in such a way.

"But my beauty will go!" cried Isobel. "I shall become an old woman at the age of thirty. I shall have to rouge to replace the bloom of youth. How awful, Arthur, when you have to kiss my rouged and raddled cheeks!"

"Let me kiss them now," he said, laughing at her absurdity, and in the shelter of the marble seat, hidden from the world beyond by the clipped hedge, he drew her head down to his shoulder and kissed her several times with a touch of passion.

She blushed furiously and fled from his arms.

"Arthur! I am ashamed of you! Disgraceful conduct on a Sunday morning!"

He came to her side again and held a little pink bow on her muslin frock to keep her prisoner.

"Then I may tell your father and mother that we are formally engaged?"

"Certainly not," said Isobel firmly. "We are *not* formally engaged. I utterly refuse to be formally engaged. If you like to tell Papa that I do not positively hate you, I have no objection, Arthur. But I am not going to be measured for my bridal robe for years and years. Seriously!"

A slight shadow passed into Arthur's eyes, extinguishing their shining light.

"Your father will be vastly disappointed, Isobel. He forgave my political opinions because he wished to see you happily married."

"I see!" said Isobel with a touch of scorn. "He is willing to sacrifice his political convictions in order to have the future Earl of Amersham as his son-in-law, with his mansions and deer parks and privilege and patronage. I am to be the price of this political bargain. Thank you, Arthur. Thank you, Papa."

She gave a mock curtsy as she stood by an old sundial and made a pretty picture there.

"Isobel," said Arthur, looking hurt, "you know that is a very naughty thing to say, and utterly untrue."

"He accuses me of lying to him," said Isobel, talking to a butterfly on the sundial before it fluttered away to the flowerbeds. "Then he swears that he loves me and wants to drag me off to church to be wedded and bedded. Oh, these men!"

"Darling Isobel," said Arthur, holding her arm, "will you let me say that we are informally engaged, if you object to the

word formally? Now that I know you love me nothing else matters."

"Informally sounds better," said Isobel. "I am an informal young woman. I have a liking for informality. . . . And now I am sure, Arthur, it is time we got ready for church. The bells have been going this quarter of an hour."

She lifted the hoops of her muslin frock and fled up the pergola to the terrace beyond.

So she was informally engaged to Arthur, Viscount Mannington, future Earl of Amersham. That afternoon, after midday dinner, her father sent for her and spoke a few words of affectionate congratulation.

"My dear Isobel, this is very good news. I cannot say how glad I am to think that you have won the love of a young man for whom I have a very high respect, although we differ in political ideals. I trust you will be worthy of him and prepare yourself by prayer and meditation for the duties of wifedom which will shortly fall to you."

"But, Papa," cried Isobel, "we are only informally engaged, and I have no thoughts of immediate marriage."

"Certainly there is no hurry, my dear," said his lordship. "Arthur must fight his election first. God bless you, my darling."

He kissed her on the forehead and signified his intention of taking his usual nap on a Sunday afternoon.

Lady Alderton had already spoken to Isobel and heard with a smile that the engagement was only informal.

"I am sure you will be very happy with Arthur, dearest," she said. "Of course marriage has its difficulties and sorrows, but then life is like that, is it not? Last night I behaved very foolishly when you said something rather wounding, something that upset me for a moment. Now this news makes me as happy as I am sure you are, darling. Of course I shall hate losing you so soon."

Isobel startled her by some impatient words.

"Mamma, you are *not* going to lose me soon. I decline to be lost. I am not going to marry Arthur or anyone else for years and years. I told him so. I want to belong to myself for ever so long. I have hardly begun to live yet. I do not know anything about myself or life or marriage or men. Why, I have only just come out of the nursery. Marriage! Why, it is absurd, Mamma! I think it is wicked—unkind of you—to want me to be taken prisoner like this, when you know what happened to yourself with Papa."

"My dearest Isobel!" cried Lady Alderton.

But Isobel left the room hurriedly and went to her own room and lay face downwards on her bed, crushing her muslin frock and sobbing into a downy pillow trimmed with lace over a pink underslip.

XXV

DURING Isobel's visit to the country Harry Verney, who found that London was strangely empty without her, obtained a position on a London newspaper as descriptive reporter and special correspondent, at the truly magnificent salary of five pounds a week.

It was due to the kindness of Mr. O'Brien, the father of the O'Brien girls who lived opposite. He met Harry in Royal Avenue one afternoon as he was on his way to his office, and stopped to speak to him.

"Would a reporting and writing job on the *Morning Chronicle* be any good to you, Mr. Verney? Sure now, I don't want to be after raising false hopes, but the Editor was asking me if I happened to know any likely young fellow good at the descriptive. Someone with the touch of George Augustus Sala or John O'Shea. 'Well, now,' I says, 'there's a young literary gentleman living down my street with a pen that can write the hind leg off a donkey, and very successful already as a freelance in the monthly magazines.' 'Ask him to step along,' says the Editor. So now I'm asking you."

Harry Verney was overwhelmed with gratitude, and stepped along that very evening to the office of the *Morning Chronicle* in the neighbourhood of Fleet Street.

Never before had he met an Editor face to face. The nearest contact he had had with such august powers was a formal slip announcing—too often—that "The Editor regrets he is unable to use the enclosed contribution", or, by enormous good fortune, "The Editor has pleasure in accepting the contribution entitled"—whatever it might be—"and a cheque will be sent on publication."

The thought of meeting an Editor and actually listening to his human voice, and having to answer his questioning, filled Harry with the deepest apprehension and nervousness, so that when he had gone as far as Temple Bar and was in Fleet Street itself he was so unnerved at the coming ordeal that he had to

turn into the Cock Tavern and order a brandy and water. Several young men, who were probably journalists, thought Harry, as he listened to their conversation, had already taken possession of the bar, and were sitting on high stools with top hats at the back of their heads, while they smoked long "churchwardens" and imbibed brandy with enthusiasm and indiscretion. They were extremely shabby, as Harry noticed, being anxious about his own appearance. Their shirts had been worn more often than was good for laundries, and were sadly frayed at the cuffs. The boots of one young gentleman were desperately in need of the cobbler, as could be seen when he put his heels on the rung of the high stool. But they talked as men of education and literary taste, and Harry listened to an argument on the subject of George Meredith, the novelist—not very famous at that time—which aroused somewhat heated discussion.

"My dear good ass," said one young man, after taking an enormous gulp of brandy and water, "the fellow doesn't write the Queen's English. Upon my soul, I can't understand what he's driving at half the time, with his obscure allusions and fantastic similes."

"You wouldn't," said the man with the degenerate boots. "A police court report is about the level of the literature which appeals to your undeveloped brain. You may take it from me that Meredith is in the direct line of descent from the English classics, Fielding and Smollett, with a touch of Congreve and Wycherly."

"My dear Jarrold," said another young man, putting his top hat carelessly over one eye. "Meredith is like a mincing dancing master compared with the strength and simplicity of Fielding."

"You call *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* the work of a dancing master? God, man, it's a masterpiece, if ever there was one! You deserve to be struck dead on that stool."

"He'll probably drop dead anyhow," said another man who had been silent until that moment. "That's the eighth brandy he's had in half an hour. No wonder he got the sack from the *Morning Post*."

"I resigned, my dear lad, I resigned. I told the Editor that he was a scurvy knave and that his breath stank in my nostrils, and that I had no respect for his mother, and that I had the honour to offer him my resignation, having accepted the post of dramatic critic on an obscure journal called *The Times* at twice the salary I was previously getting."

A roar of derisive laughter followed this narrative.

Harry paid for his brandy and departed. It seemed incredible that any man should address an Editor in such disrespectful terms. Probably the man was lying. But it was a magnificent lie.

Buoyed up with a little Dutch courage, he proceeded on his way to the *Morning Chronicle*, passing a poor ragged wretch in the grasp of two policemen, and being accosted by a haggard young woman at the top of Whitefriars Street. A group of rough-looking louts were gathered outside the newspaper office, waiting, perhaps, for the first edition, and whiling away the time by playing leap-frog. On the steps of a building opposite an old woman was sleeping in a bundle of rags.

"Grub Street," thought Harry, and his pulse tingled at the thought that he might be admitted to its portals as a regular staff man. It was the great chance of his life, perhaps—the road to fame and fortune. Charles Dickens had begun as a reporter. It was the entrance behind the scenes of the human drama. It would take him into many strange places. He would watch life's pageant and record its happenings. He would be the chronicler of history, the critic of his own times, the judge of those who sat in the seats of the mighty. In any case he would earn Five Pounds a week! . . .

Standing for a moment in the gas-lit street before going through a swing door on which was the magic word *Editorial*, he had a vision of Isobel Ingleby as he had seen her first at Lady Amersham's reception, in a rose-pink frock covered with white chiffon, with a rose in her hair and another at her breast, exquisite and beautiful. She was remote from him in the social scale, and yet their lives had touched and his would never be the same. Perhaps he would meet her when he was a journalist, and would look at her from afar. She might see him standing among his fellow Press men, behind some red rope or barrier. She might see the worship in his eyes.

"Now then, young feller, get a move on, can't yer?" shouted a hoarse voice. It was a man leading a van and horse down the narrow street dimly lit by the flickering gas lamps.

Harry went through the swing door and up some wooden stairs almost in darkness, and reached a landing where there was a strong smell of steak and onions, and a man behind a glass partition. He waited patiently for the man to raise his head from a yellow-backed novel. But his patience was unrewarded. Then he coughed and shuffled his feet without disturbing the reader. Finally he tapped at the glass window, and succeeded in securing

the attention of a red-nosed and unshaven individual who stared at him with bleary eyes.

"What d'yer want?"

"I want to see the Editor," said Harry humbly.

"Well, yer can't."

The man dropped his eyes to his book again.

"I have an appointment with him," said Harry. "Mr. O'Brien asked me to call."

"Oh, well, why didn't yer say so? What name?"

Reluctantly he left his book, spat on the bare boards, and disappeared down a long corridor. While Harry waited, a rat scuttled out of a dark cupboard, peered with red eyes at the visitor, and slunk into the glass-partitioned room.

The man returned with a brief message, which he indicated with a jerk of his thumb towards the end of the corridor.

"Last door on the right."

"The Editor's room?" asked Harry.

"Well, who do yer think?"

Harry went down the dark corridor, heard voices coming from doors each side of it, smelt the aroma of coarse tobacco mingled with the still stronger reek of steak and onions, and tapped at the last door on the right.

"Come in!" shouted a hearty voice.

Harry opened the door, paused for a moment because of the strong light inside, and then entered. He was in the presence of the Editor, although for a moment he wondered if the gentleman in shirt-sleeves, with a plate of food by his side and a bottle of beer within reach, might be by any chance one of the composers, or the Editor's clerk, or some low-class character writing the story of his life. But he was reassured by a friendly and cultured voice.

"Good evening, Mr. Verney. Verney, isn't it? O'Brien mentioned you the other day. Take a seat while I read this letter—written by an illiterate ass who has the infernal impudence to criticize the policy of the *Morning Chronicle*. A peer of the Realm, God help us!"

Harry took a seat timidly, sitting on the very edge of his chair, with his top hat on his knees and his silver-knobbed cane between them. He ventured to glance at the Editor and saw that he was a middle-aged man with disordered hair, which grew not only on his head and face but out of his ears and nostrils. He was wearing a flannel shirt, to which, no doubt, belonged a pair of false cuffs placed beside the inkpot. The aroma of steak

and onions which pervaded the office could be traced to the plate at his side. He was smoking a heavy meerschaum pipe from which came little puffs of white smoke. The room was littered with newspapers, proof sheets, reference books and letters, and presently another rat, brother or cousin to the one in the corridor, appeared furtively beneath a chair and rustled among the litter on the floor.

Certainly the office of a London editor was not a very grand place. But it was the headquarters of a great power. It was vibrating, no doubt, with human intelligence. It was more important than a Palace, at least in the imagination of a young man who sat waiting with hope in his heart.

The Editor glanced thoughtfully from the letter, and his gaze fell for a moment upon the rat.

"Hullo, Rupert!" he said genially, and threw the beast a morsel from the plate at his side.

"Quite harmless," he said to Harry. "This place is swarming with 'em. They come from the river, you know."

Then he swung round in his chair and smiled at Harry through a pair of metal-rimmed spectacles.

"Well, young man, so you think you can write, eh?"

Harry blushed at this direct challenge to his literary conceit.

"I have had a few things accepted," he answered modestly.

"*Household Words*, the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and so forth."

"And so forth," repeated the Editor, whom afterwards Harry came to know as Mr. Edwin Alfred Adlard, M.A. Oxon, but among his fellow Press men, in strict privacy, as Old Esau, due to his unusual hairiness even in an age of hirsute luxuriance.

That repetition of the words "And so forth", followed by a sepulchral laugh, froze the blood of a young gentleman in search of a job.

"The *Quiver*," said the Editor, "the *Lady's Keepsake*, the *Bow Bells Novelette*."

Harry was silent and stricken, remembering that in very fact one of his stories had appeared in the *Bow Bells Novelette*.

The Editor struck a match of the fusee variety and lit his pipe again, smiling over it with what seemed to Harry a kind of anthropoid mirth.

"Had any education?" asked the Editor.

Harry murmured something about having read a good deal.

"Have you been to Oxford, by any chance?"

Harry admitted mournfully that he had not been to Oxford,

and by this admission he felt that he had lost his chance on the *Morning Chronicle*. But the Editor seemed to be pleased by his admission.

"Good! Good! There's some hope for you as a journalist. This street is crowded with men who were Double Firsts, or who, in that city of lost hopes, spent long and weary years in the utterly unprofitable labour of reading obscure classics and studying dead languages, with the horrible result that they cannot write their own nor describe the simplest fact of human life without dragging in a Latin tag or a Greek allusion, to the great annoyance of my compositors and the still greater tribulation of my readers, who belong exclusively, thank God, to the Lower Middle Class, upon whom the hopes of this unhappy land utterly depend."

As though exhausted by this extremely long sentence, the Editor opened a bottle of beer and poured himself a foaming glass therefrom with which he quenched his thirst.

"In short," he added, after this agreeable operation, "you wish to write some tripe for the *Morning Chronicle*?"

"I should like to write for it," said Harry.

The Editor stared at him, not unamiably, through his metal-rimmed glasses.

"I shouldn't if I were you," he advised with a kind of fatherly warning. "'All hope abandon, ye who enter here.' A journalist is no better than a rogue and a vagabond. He is ostracized by Society. He is insulted by the flunkeys of the Nobs. He is, quite justly, despised by the Respectable. He is an eavesdropper, a Peeping Tom of life, a snapper up of unconsidered trifles, like Autolycus, the hedge thief. He earns a miserable pittance in unhealthy conditions. He ruins his digestion by irregular meals and his soul by pretending a political passion or a moral fervour which he does not feel. The journalist, in fact, my dear young man, is both a Parasite and a Pariah. I strongly advise you to go in for haberdashery or some other more honourable avocation."

"I have a great ambition to write for the Press," said Harry with quiet obstinacy.

The Editor shrugged his shoulders.

"Just as you like. Don't say I didn't warn you. We want a weekly column of Blither and Blather—the private view at the Royal Academy; a reception at Lady Amersham's; a scene in a police court; Covent Garden at dawn; a Salvation Army meeting; a murder trial at the Old Bailey; Derby Day; Ascot. You know the sort of stuff? George Augustus Sala, Dickens and

water. Laughter and tears. Literary diarrhœa. I understand from O'Brien that you can do that kind of thing."

Harry Verney did not like to confess to a talent which this alarming Editor described so brutally. On the other hand, the subjects suggested appealed to him as a descriptive writer. A weekly article was exactly what he wanted. It would leave him time for other work—short stories—perhaps one day a novel—or, better still, a play.

"I should like to try," he ventured to say.

The Editor snorted, and for the second time repeated his words with awful irony.

"He would like to try! The young gentleman would like to try! I shall have the painful duty of reading his efforts. If they are not too deplorable, the readers of the *Morning Chronicle* will glance at them on their way to City offices by three-horse omnibuses. Tradespeople, anxious about last week's bills, will use them as wrappers to their fish or groceries. Their wives and daughters will tear out the young gentleman's purple patches to make curl-papers for their hair or spills for their mantelpieces. How much do you expect to be paid for a weekly article of this kind, young man?"

"I leave it entirely to you, sir," said Harry.

The Editor laughed again with that deep-throated anthropoidal mirth which was disconcerting to a visitor.

"O'Brien said something about five pounds a week. Is that worth your while as the price of your immortal soul?"

"Thank you," said Harry. "A thousand thanks, sir."

Mr. Edwin Alfred Adlard held out a hairy hand.

"Let me have your first article by Tuesday. Not later than six o'clock. Tell that red-nosed fellow down the passage—Birdseed by name—that I've put you on the staff. Otherwise he won't let you pass his alcoholic barrier. Good evening, Mr. Verney."

Harry Verney was on the staff of the *Morning Chronicle*. When he went out to the narrow, dimly lit street he walked on air. He laughed aloud at the extraordinary man who was to be his Editor. He took off his hat as he strode along the Thames towards Chelsea, letting the breezes blow through his hair and cool his fevered brow. He was on the way to a great career, with the light of fame ahead. He was going to earn the incredible salary of five pounds a week, which would make him independent of his mother's income. The world would be his peepshow. Everything that happened in London would be the raw material for his imaginative and literary craft. He would get deep into

its tragedy and comedy. He would look on at this human drama as a critic. He would dedicate his soul to Truth. He would try to see the beauty lurking behind ugliness, and the romance behind squalor, and the heroism of humble lives. Every line he wrote would be written for one reader who believed in his genius. Isobel Ingleby would read the *Morning Chronicle* and see his name below the weekly column. Perhaps she would laugh over it sometimes. Perhaps her tears would fall over some touch of pathos. Their minds would meet across the great gulf of social caste which divided them.

XXVI

I HAVE lately turned up the old files of the *Morning Chronicle* for the year 1868 and read some of Harry Verney's articles. They were printed every Friday and signed only by his initials, in a long, solid column unbroken by headlines. They were astoundingly dull, those Victorian papers, until thirty years later a young man named Harmsworth catered for a new public which had come into being after a generation had enjoyed the dangerous privilege of elementary education. We know what has developed out of that popular journalism—its constant appeal to the sensation of the moment, its journalistic stunts, its insincerities, its vulgarities, its howling headlines, which make no impression except a general hubbub, its appeal to false emotion, cheap sentiment, and the scatterbrained interests of the mob mind. But one must admit that for amusement and entertainment covering the daily panorama of news from all parts of the world the modern journal is incomparably more efficient than its Victorian predecessors.

Perhaps for that reason its interest is more subtle, penetrating, and demoralizing. Dullness may be preferable to a ceaseless excitement of futile interest in a multitude of facts which cannot be co-ordinated or remembered. Be that as it may, those newspapers of the 'sixties were not bright reading. Their news was severely limited to reports of Parliament, police court cases, occasional items of foreign intelligence, accounts of balls and routs with lists of guests, paragraphs of social events, odd bits of sporting news, and a little financial information. Dramatic criticism was erratic and occasional. *The Times* did not deign to notice most plays, but sent its reporter to the Opera on a first night of some leading dramatist like Mr. Robertson. The old *Thunderer* was read by the Nobility and Gentry of the Realm, not for sensational news, but for the ponderous leading articles which prefaced its pages and gave a moral and intellectual leadership to the nation.

Written with political dogmatism, brightened by a touch

of irony, an occasional gleam of wit, a rare excursion into comedy, they were fearless in their criticism of great statesmen and even dared to disagree now and then with the actions or opinions of the Sovereign Herself. They were read with fury by politicians whose principles they attacked, and with enthusiasm by others whose policy they defended. Interlarded with classical allusions, they revealed the good scholarship of their anonymous writers, who wielded a greater power in a small governing class than any newspaper of to-day. But no body of readers nowadays would tolerate their heavy moralizing and their turgid style. They might have been written by Queen Victoria's favourite Bishops, and it is certain they were written by gentlemen of university distinction who had become journalists because they had no reasonable chance of becoming Bishops.

The *Morning Chronicle* was not so severe in its style, and did attempt to give a little human interest to its pages, but without going far in that direction. It seems to me, turning over those time-stained sheets, that Harry Verney's Friday column was a green oasis in an arid desert of political opinion, criminal cases, and articles on such subjects as City lighting and draining, or reports of speeches by City aldermen.

Reading Harry's essays now, above the initials H.V., one smiles at their stilted style and their old-fashioned sentiment. Like other writers of his time, he could not refrain from pointing a moral or stressing the pathos of his subject with a tear at the tip of his pen. He was unable to escape from the influence of Dickens, who had dealt with the same subjects with an incomparable genius. Harry harrowed the feelings of his readers by descriptions of ragged children, homeless women, spendthrifts reduced to rags and tatters, foggy days in mean streets, the tragedies of the doss-house and the police court. Yet something of himself comes through—his romantic temperament, his sense of humour (limited by Victorian conventions), his idealism, his belief in Democracy, if it were given a chance, his humanity, his dramatic instinct. One feels the sincerity of these articles by a young man not disillusioned by reality or bitterness. They are not without an old-fashioned charm at times. Now and again there is a phrase which lights up the scene, although he indulged in deplorable *clichés*, as they are now called. Perhaps he invented some of them, such as "velvet darkness" and "lush grass" and "deepening twilight", and "the uniforms gave a touch of colour to the scene", and "the sun broke forth just as the bride came from the church".

Apart from style, these articles have a certain historical value. Here is London of the 'sixties and 'seventies as it was seen by a young man observant of life. It was in many ways a good place and time in which to live. It was still possible to take a stroll down Fleet Street like Dr. Johnson instead of being elbowed by a surging crowd. There were still green fields within a mile or two of Charing Cross, not further than the Edgware Road, although Mr. Cubitt and the jerry-builders were beginning to extend the radius of stucco-fronted houses into quiet old suburbs like Clapham and Brixton, which had been country villages twenty years before.

The Upper Middle Class was vastly prosperous and comfortable owing to the increase of industrial wealth and the ever growing demand for English coal, cotton goods, and manufactured articles by all nations of the world. It was the beginning of the Golden Age of England, never, perhaps, to be seen again, because the other nations have caught up in the use of machinery and make their own things instead of buying them. The nobility still maintained their power and privileges, and Society had a very definite place and meaning which it has now lost. Their barouches and broughams rolled through Belgrave Square and Mayfair, with plump horses and fatted flunkeys. Outside their town houses of eighteenth-century architecture striped awnings were put up, and red carpets laid down, for great balls and receptions during the London season, attended by Beauty and Fashion with a great display of jewels and Orders and foreign decorations and outward splendour, dazzling to the eyes of the populace.

In other and better ways it was a Golden Age. Our younger cynics may sneer at these Victorians, but they had character and quality among them. Genius was not rare, when Thomas Carlyle lived in Cheyne Walk, when Tennyson was not yet Poet Laureate, when Dickens was still alive, when Swinburne was a young man, when Rossetti was taking chloral for insomnia, when Meredith was writing novels, and when Hardy produced (in 1874) *Far from the Madding Crowd*, with a host of other writers, painters, poets, scholars, and scientists flinging themselves into creative energy with a passion, enthusiasm, and faith which were not quickly spent. They were eager explorers of truth—though we doubt some of their conclusions. They tried to reveal new aspects of beauty—though some of their results were horrible. They were pioneers and explorers in the world of science, with dreadful results to humanity driven mad by speed

and threatened with extinction by destructive powers too dangerous to be handled by the human tribe. They had the glorious anticipation of "progress", and believed that every day and in every way the world would get better and better. How splendid to live in such a time!

And yet there was another side to the picture, as in all such pictures of a period, and one sees it very clearly in some of Harry Verney's articles. Below the comfortable Middle Class there was still a mass of misery in sweated industries and casual labour. The Factory Acts promoted by Lord Shaftesbury and others had reduced some of the horrors of the industrial North, with its child slavery and stunted women on miserable wages, but the wealth of the manufacturers—those side-whiskered old gentlemen who prayed into their top hats every Sunday morning and thanked God they were not as other men—loose-livers and playgoers—was still based on buying in the cheapest markets—even their factory hands—and selling in the dearest, without regard to the conditions of their workshops, or their workpeople.

In London, through which Harry Verney wandered with a notebook and a watchful eye, there was, below the surface of its respectability and social order, a cesspool of brutality, vice and wretchedness, due to lack of decent conditions for many human beings, deprived of light, water, and air in their foul slums. No wonder there was an outbreak of garrotting, and that in any crowd young pickpockets were busy with absent-minded "toffs", as Harry found to his cost when he lost a silver watch, given to him by his sister Kate, and two golden sovereigns from his fob pocket. No wonder that the gin palaces were crowded with poor wretches—women as well as men—drowning the daily misery of their lives in cheap and filthy alcohol which lighted them up for an hour or two, filled their hell with laughter, and made them careless of their own damnation.

Harry Verney ventured into some of these low "pubs" beyond the Mile End Road, and shuddered at the sight of young girls mad drunk and fighting the police when they went shrieking into the streets before they were carried off on stretchers for a night in the cells. Salvation Army lassies came into these dens, fearlessly tinkling their tambourines and calling upon the brutal-looking men to wash themselves in the Blood of the Lamb, and he noticed that they were never ill-treated in the roughest crowd, although some of the women screamed at them with foul words and shrieks of mirth. Once he came home to Royal

Avenue with a black eye, and the marks of a woman's fingernails down his right cheek. He had tried to rescue her from a man who was intent on beating her to death in a dark street off Islington. She had turned on him like a tiger cat for daring to knock her man about.

Always in Piccadilly and its neighbourhood, especially in the Burlington Arcade on any afternoon, young women, smartly and fashionably dressed, prowled about to accost any young "swell" who passed. They were the same class of girl whom Harry had seen in Ranelagh Gardens with his mother, and they ogled him as he looked into shop windows to study an old print or a well-bound book, and sometimes grabbed him with little gloved hands which he shook off hurriedly.

"Hullo, Charlie! Haven't I seen your charming face before? Lord Charles FitzClarence, if I'm not making a mistake? Well, you needn't look so serious, dearie. Life's a great game, isn't it? For those that have the luck, I mean! Oh, you're not free this afternoon? My misfortune!"

He lifted his hat and passed on, with pity in his heart because he knew now that their way of life was forced on them by economic conditions and horrible homes and the brutality of men. He was no longer so self-righteous as he had been when he was angry with his mother for going to one of their hunting-grounds. He came to know some of them by sight—these ladies of the town, as they were called in the *Beggar's Opera* and old plays. Sometimes he could not avoid talking with them, as one night at a Fancy Dress Ball at Covent Garden, where he went to write a description for the *Morning Chronicle*.

Some of them were in costumes hired from theatrical wardrobes, somewhat faded and frayed, with torn lace and dirty hems after much use in Christmas pantomimes. They were Columbines in pink tights, and French Ladies of the eighteenth century in Pompadour wigs, and Venetian Ladies in masks and dominoes. There was a Puss-in-Boots with a long tail with which she played skittishly, and a white-faced Pierrot, and a Dolly Varden. Others had made up costumes from bits of muslin and plush and cheap silk. Some of them were better dressed in frocks which, perhaps, they had made themselves or bought out of their earnings. They were still pretty and vivacious, and there was no need of paint and powder to hide hard lines about their lips and eyes, or to cover a deathlike pallor, as among some of their sisters. They had bought their tickets for a guinea, chancing the loss, and came flouncing in with little cries of sham

delight at the sight of young gentlemen, and old gentlemen, whom they had met before, or at the glare of gaslight from the candelabra adapted to this new form of lighting and flooding the polished boards.

"Oh my! Isn't it a dream, dearie? Such an assembly of wealth and fashion. Surely that's a face I know? Oxford in every hair of his pretty whiskers!"

This lady was of the Stuart period, with long ringlets and a low-cut bodice.

"I'm afraid not," said Harry Verney, who was in the costume of David Copperfield. "I never happened to be at Oxford."

"Oh, well, never mind. You're very good-looking all the same. Buy me a glass of port, darling. I'm feeling faint with expectation of delight."

He bought her a glass of port, and found her intelligent and amusing, like a Victorian Nell Gwynne. She did actually know—at least by sight—some of the men who came drifting into the ballroom, and staggered Harry by mentioning their names—names not unknown in English history and belonging to the great families of England.

"There's that comical young man Lord B——, dressed like Beau Brummel. He's a friend of a girl I know called Kitty Belsize. And there's that old devil the Marquis of A——, looking like Satan, with one foot in the grave and a leery eye for any naughty puss."

She put her hand on Harry's arm and spoke in a whisper.

"See that bald-headed gent with white whiskers and a gold chain on his stomach, like Mr. Pickwick? That's Mr. C——, the banker. They say he sleeps on gold. Wish I could sneak that watch-chain. He's keeping that wench with the black eyes dressed like a gipsy. A beauty, isn't she? She used to work in a match factory down Mile End Road. I know because I was there myself before I took to a gay life. . . . Now I wonder who that nice-looking boy made up as Dick Sheridan is, with Daisy Twigg. I'd like to warn him off that little slut. He ought to be in the nursery with his Nanna to tuck him up."

Harry happened to know who it was. It was Isobel's brother Richard, who had come to the dancing class with her. He was shocked to see him at this public dance crowded with disreputable men and women, among whom were old rakes and young swells of the sporting and pugilistic world disguised as princes and monks and bandits, with medical students out for a spree in fantastic costumes of romance, and young City men

who would fall asleep over their ledgers next morning, and smart thieves—so Harry guessed—with shifty eyes for such tempting things as a gold watch-chain on a white waistcoat.

Richard Ingleby, looking charming and elegant as Dick Sheridan, had two or three friends with him, and they had dined too well, it seemed, before attending the Covent Garden Ball, judging from their flushed faces and their loud boyish laughter, and their easy behaviour with the painted girls who clung to them.

"Good God," thought Harry, "Isobel would weep to see her brother in a place like this! I wonder if I can warn him against that awful-looking girl, and get him safely home before worse things happen?"

But Richard Ingleby was enjoying himself vastly. Later in the evening Harry saw him sitting in an alcove where refreshments were served, with three of his friends and two girls, of whom one was Daisy Twigg, according to her fellow worker in a match factory. They were drinking champagne, and as Richard filled up the glass of the girl who had her head on his shoulder, he spilt half of it down her frock so that she sat up with a scream and smacked his face.

"You'll have to pay for that, you blithering little ass!" she screamed. "It's the only nice frock I have, and it ain't paid for."

"Exquisite creature!" said Richard Ingleby. "I will pay for dozens of frocks. I will clothe you in cloth of gold. Thou art black but beautiful, O daughter of Jerusalem. Fair art thou, my beloved, and comely. Stay me up with flowers, compass me with apples, because I languish with love."

"The boy is balmy," said Daisy Twigg's girl friend with a screech of laughter at this quotation from Solomon.

"Richard, old boy," said one of his friends with a touch of anxiety, "for heaven's sake don't drink any more of this poisonous liquid or you'll be getting into trouble."

"Craven-hearted loon," cried Richard, "drink deep of the Pierian spring, or drink not at all. And to think that my noble father is an Evangelical and has never tasted the joys of Covent Garden on a gala night! Sad, sad! What a lot of life is missed by the self-righteous. Give me liberty of conscience, liberty of speech, liberty of love!"

One of the Masters of Ceremony came to Richard Ingleby's alcove and whispered something to the most sober-looking young gentleman—the one who had given his warning to his friend.

He also glared at Daisy Twigg and made a gesture with his right thumb as though he would have her flung out if she made such a noise.

"Oh, go and boil your head!" said Miss Daisy Twigg.

"Who is this impertinent menial?" asked Richard languidly. "Brain him with an empty bottle of bubbly, my dear Frank, only for goodness' sake don't waste a bottle still undrunk. As the son of an Evangelical father——"

"Now look here, young fellow," said the Master of Ceremony, "I don't mind you enjoying yourself, but don't make so much noise about it. We have to be careful of police regulations. You're getting a bit too fresh in this corner. See? Just a friendly hint, and no offence meant."

"No offence?" said Richard indignantly. "But my good fool, I find you most offensive. I do not like either your face or your manner. Unless you remove yourself rapidly I shall improve your looks by giving you a black eye, and your manners by kicking the back part of your pants. Take this also as a friendly hint."

"Oh, isn't he delicious, our baby boy!" cried Miss Daisy Twigg.

"Madam," said Richard with terrific gravity, "I dislike being called your baby boy. Kindly treat me with respect. Kindly remember that I was brought up with Evangelical principles."

He was getting very drunk and slightly quarrelsome.

Later in the evening Harry Verney, who was making mental notes on this scene, found him leaning up against a pillar, looking round at the crowd, who were dancing a cotillon, as though searching for someone. His powdered wig was on one side, showing a lock of ruddy brown hair.

"Good evening," said Harry, greeting him for the first time. "Do you remember me by any chance? Harry Verney, you know. We met at Mrs. Bland's dancing class."

Richard recognized him by a remarkable effort of courtesy.

"My dear fellow, delighted to see you. Can you tell me where I may find a poisonous-looking fellow with a nose which asks—positively asks—to be punched? He was extremely impertinent to me a long while ago, I think it must have been years ago, but I never forget a friend or an enemy. He is my enemy. He was very rude to me. I wish to punch him on the nose."

Harry laughed uneasily.

"There are so many noses here that one might like to punch."

"Exactly!" agreed Richard cordially. "Exactly, my dear fellow. Let us punch the first nose that comes along."

He stood up straight from the pillar against which he had been leaning, swayed slightly on the tips of his toes, clenched his fist, and swung it at the nose of a young man who happened to pass by on his way to the buffet. The young man resented the blow, although it had only touched him lightly.

"What's that for?" he asked.

"I dislike your nose," said Richard. "It's a most objectionable nose."

"Oh, you do, do you? Well, take that!"

His left arm shot out like a thunderbolt, and Richard Ingleby measured his length on the floor. As it transpired later, he had been unfortunate in his choice of victim, having challenged Jimmy Bird, the middle-weight champion of Blackfriars.

It was astonishing how quickly Richard Ingleby was transported from the light and glamour of this Covent Garden Ball into the darkness of the market outside. Probably these little incidents had led to considerable efficiency on the part of the Master of Ceremonies and his chuckers-out.

Harry Verney followed him, and bent over him as he lay unconscious on some damp straw in one of the alcoves of the fruit market. A group of porters crowded round, laughing heartily at the sight of this young swell laid out so neatly.

"Serve him bleeding well right," said one of them. "Asked for it, I 'aven't a doubt."

"One of them toffs what can't 'old their liquor," said another man. "Don't 'ave to sweat like we do, mate."

"It's the bubbly stuff wot does it," said a third man, wiping his mouth with the back of a dirty hand. "Give me beer."

A party of men and women in dominoes and masks raced each other through the market, singing and shouting, just as the first glimmer of dawn showed in the sky of a June morning and heavy carts laden with vegetables came crawling down Henrietta Street with tired horses and drowsy drivers. Richard Ingleby groaned and then sat up.

"Feeling better?" asked Harry.

"Perfectly rotten," said Richard. "I have an idea that I drank a little too much somewhere. I may say"—here he groaned—"that I still feel deplorably drunk."

That was lamentably true. When he staggered to his feet he clutched Harry's arm, and but for that support would have

fallen against the railings of St. Paul's Church, where so many such scenes had happened since Hogarth painted them.

"I'll drive you home in a hansom," said Harry.

Richard Ingleby made a gesture of resolute refusal.

"My dear old boy, you will do no such thing. Nothing will induce me to go home so early. I intend to enjoy myself in a haunt of beauty and fashion from which I was ignominiously—he had great difficulty with this word—"and villainously expelled. I am going back to the Ball. Not like Cinderella, poor dear creature, but like the Prodigal Son for whom the fatted calf was roasted whole. My dear old friend and college chum, lend me your arm, as Julius Cæsar said to Mark Antony when they walked up the steps of the Capitol."

It is regrettable to relate that the son and heir of the Earl of Alderton began to sing a vulgar ballad entitled, "At Trinity Church I met my Doom", to the great amusement of the Covent Garden porters.

"The Ball is over," said Harry, lying in the cause of virtue and peace. "Everybody has gone home, old man. The lights have been turned out by this time."

Richard Ingleby grasped him firmly by the arm and spoke gravely.

"Don't you believe it, Verney, my dear fellow. It's just a trick. All the lights will go up again when I return to the dance. In any case I didn't say good night to that sweet creature Daisy Twigg. The poor girl will think I've forgotten my manners."

That was precisely what Harry was bent on preventing. By some fortunate chance Richard Ingleby had escaped from the clutches of that disreputable young woman, and Harry had firmly decided that he should not risk falling once more into the hands of that Circe.

"I beg you to let me take you home," he urged. "It's already daylight. There's no more fun to be had."

"Oh, lots of fun," said Richard Ingleby. "I'm only just beginning to enjoy myself."

Nothing would persuade him to go home, not even a friendly policeman who came along and spoke firmly on the subject.

"Time you young fellows cleared off. Can't have no loitering in the market, you know. Now off you go, gentlemen."

"Constable," said Richard, with great dignity, "if I have any more insolence from you I shall have to chastise you."

This remark was greeted with loud guffaws from the group of porters.

"That's right, sir. Show your spirit. Tap 'is claret. Give 'im one on the beak!"

The policeman began to get annoyed. He took hold of Richard's arm and jerked it.

"Better move on, young man."

"Constable," said Richard, "I'm very cross with you. You are an overfed hound of the tyrannical Law."

The word "hound" annoyed the constable still further, especially as the porters received the statement with applause.

"'Ound, eh? Well, we'll see about that. You're drunk and disorderly, that's what you are. I'll charge you with it. Now come along of me."

He blew his whistle, and two more constables came running up with their pot hats jammed over their ears and their truncheons drawn.

Harry intervened, and was promptly grabbed by one of the new arrivals.

"There's a nice little cell in Bow Street," said the man who held him. "Better come quiet, young fellow."

The next scene at the hour of dawn on a June day was in Bow Street police station, where Harry and Richard, in their costumes as David Copperfield and Richard Sheridan, were questioned by the police inspector on the other side of a wooden railing. The court was already crowded with charges—a girl pickpocket, a drunken swell, a poor drab accused of stealing a lady's shawl, a white-faced Pierrot whose voice betrayed her sex and her alcoholic state. All of them were sent off to the cells, in spite of their shrieks and tears and curses.

"Now then, what about these young gentlemen?" asked the inspector, glancing at Harry and Richard.

"Drunk and disorderly, sir. Fighting the police to avoid arrest. Very bad cases."

"What names?" asked the inspector, scratching the back of his ear with the tail of a quill pen.

"Inspector," said Harry quietly, "may I just say that in the first place I am not drunk, and in the second that I shall make myself responsible for the good behaviour of my friend, who unfortunately became slightly excited at the Fancy Dress Ball. My name is Harry Verney, special correspondent of the *Morning Chronicle*. My friend is the son of a distinguished gentleman, and would doubtless prefer not to be mentioned in connection with this affair. He wishes to remain strictly anonymous."

"My father, sir," said Richard, "is an Evangelical. I am

the unhappy victim of his moral severity. But I quite agree with my dear friend here that it is best to remain strictly harmonious."

"Any proof that you belong to the *Morning Chronicle*, Mr. Verney?" asked the inspector, with a sudden and remarkable politeness, showing that the power of the Press had already made itself felt in 1868.

Harry produced a card from his waistcoat pocket. There was all the proof necessary :

MR. HENRY VERNEY

The Morning Chronicle.

"Sorry you have been brought here, Mr. Verney. Quite a mistake, of course. Constable, show these gentlemen out and call a hansom for them. Good night, Mr. Verney. I always read the *Morning Chronicle*. So does my Missus."

Harry shook him by the hand warmly, and promised to send him a copy of the issue containing his article on the Covent Garden Ball.

In the hansom cab Richard fell asleep with his head on Harry's shoulder, which was whitened by the powder of Dick Sheridan's wig.

The cabby opened the trap above their heads.

"Which way, guvnor?"

"Royal Avenue, Chelsea," said Harry.

It was daylight when they reached Chelsea, and Richard Ingleby was somewhat sobered after his nap. At least he was sober enough to creep quietly up to Harry's room, after whispered explanations in the hall.

He slept with his clothes on, stretched out on Harry's bed, while the special correspondent of the *Morning Chronicle* spent two uncomfortable hours in an armchair stuffed with horsehair, until he heard Kate singing to herself at the beginning of another day. Then he went downstairs and made himself a cup of tea before breaking the news about their distinguished visitor to his mother and sister.

XXVII

RICHARD INGLEBY was slightly ashamed of himself when he awakened next morning at about midday, after six hours of heavy sleep. His head still ached, and his face was pallid under the white wig which he still wore so that it showed a touch of his ruddy brown hair.

Downstairs Kate was vastly excited by having him in the house, especially in his costume of Dick Sheridan, and was grievously tempted to peep in upon him as he lay asleep, and would have done so but for the strong sense of propriety, which she thought ridiculous, in her brother Harry. He skated somewhat lightly over the events of last night, not referring to Richard's intoxication or the scene in the police station, but both Kate and his mother suspected that he was not telling the whole story.

"But, my dear Harry," said Mrs. Verney, "why didn't he go home to his own house? I suppose he has a latchkey, hasn't he? And in any case there are half a dozen footmen to open the door to him. Why bring him here to spoil your own sleep?"

"Well, you see," said Harry, "his people are away in the country just now, and the servants might have been a bit shocked if he came home at daybreak."

"Fiddlesticks!" laughed Mrs. Verney. "You can't shock those flunkeys. They're limbs of Satan."

"The truth is, perhaps," said Kate, "that our young friend had drunk too deeply of the cup that cheers. As the Bard says, what fools men are to pour stuff down their throats to steal away their brains. Or something to that effect."

"Don't go imagining things, Kate," said Harry hurriedly. "I didn't suggest anything of the kind."

"No," answered Kate, "but I've read my Shakespeare and I'm not ignorant of the frailties of men. Meanwhile, dear brother, what does a young nobleman eat for breakfast? Dare we present him with a hard-boiled egg, or must we send out for larks' tongues

or the breast of peacock? Are you sure I can't slip upstairs and take just one peep at him?"

"Kate!" exclaimed Harry. "Haven't you any modesty? Dash it all, you can't go plunging into a man's bedroom."

"Why not?" asked Kate. "As long as he's asleep——"

"Don't be silly, Kate," said Mrs. Verney. "Sometimes I think I haven't brought you up properly. I ought to have spanked you a bit harder when you were a naughty child. I'm sure I set you a good example. You don't find me peeping into gentlemen's bedrooms."

"It's the first time we have had a gentleman sleeping in the house," argued Kate. "You haven't been tempted, Mother."

"That girl will be the death of me!" exclaimed Mrs. Verney, laughing at Kate's impudence. "Now don't look so shocked, Harry. It's only her sense of humour. Pass over that strawberry jam, if you feel strong enough after last night's orgy."

When Harry tiptoed into his bedroom somewhat later, he found Richard Ingleby standing before the mirror on the painted dressing-table, staring at his own pallor.

"Had a good rest?" asked Harry.

"Slept like a log," answered Richard.

His face flushed a little before he spoke again.

"I say, Verney, this is most frightfully good of you. I'm afraid I have a very vague remembrance of what happened last night. I must have been lamentably the worse for drink."

"It was that filthy champagne," said Harry charitably.

Richard was thoughtful, and put his hand up to his forehead and looked extraordinarily handsome with the lace ruffles falling from his wrist as he stood there in his silk coat and breeches, with white stockings and buckled shoes.

"Didn't we get taken to Bow Street?" he asked. "I seem to remember lots of policemen and a police court, and something somebody said about a night in the cells."

Harry laughed uneasily.

"As a matter of fact we *were* taken to Bow Street for a few minutes."

Richard remembered a little more.

"You worked a miracle somehow. I have a vague idea that you pulled out a card and after that the police became extremely civil. Pretty good work, that! I can't think how you did it."

Harry explained the power of the Press, of which he happened to hold the key as a member of the *Morning Chronicle* staff.

"By Jove, that's pretty marvellous!" said Richard, greatly

impressed. "Well, all I can say, Verney, is that I'm devilish obliged to you. I fail to imagine what would have happened if my noble father had had to bail me out, or saw that I had been brought up before the beak as a drunk and disorderly. A thousand thanks, my dear fellow. If ever I can be of the slightest service to you——"

Rather diffidently Harry offered to lend him a change of clothes, so that he could get home without attracting public attention, but he was relieved when Richard said he could get into a growler and hide himself in its depths. As a young man of fashion he would have scorned one of Harry's well-worn suits. When he went down to his breakfast the maid stared at him through the banisters from the landing below, opened her eyes very wide, and said "OO!" in an audible voice. Kate was waiting for him in the dining-room, and at the appearance of Mr. Richard Sheridan, who was also Richard, Viscount Ingleby, dropped a low curtsy with mock humility.

"I trust your lordship slept well?"

"Oh, good morning," said Richard Ingleby, laughing with a touch of embarrassment because of his costume and last night's adventures. "I'm sorry to appear in this ridiculous fancy dress, but your brother was good enough to bring me back last night—or rather early this morning, I'm afraid. I do hope it hasn't put you to any trouble?"

"We are proud and honoured to offer you our humble hospitality," said Kate, still play-acting.

For a moment he wondered if she might be serious, but then he saw the glint in her eyes and laughed good-humouredly.

"It's extraordinarily kind of you. I really don't deserve it."

"No trouble at all," said Mrs. Verney, appearing from the kitchen with a little tray on which his breakfast had been laid out. "I've been young in my time and I know the morning after the night before feeling. Dreadful, isn't it? Now here's a nice strong cup of coffee for you."

"Really, Mrs. Verney," exclaimed Richard, taking the tray from her hurriedly, "I can't thank you enough! Honestly, it makes me feel embarrassed. So much kindness when I come sneaking into your house uninvited and all that——"

"Don't worry about that, my dear. I used to be an actress, you know. One-night stands in the Provinces, and a shake-down as best one could. There's nothing formal about us, is there, Harry?"

Harry had a secret wish that his mother might be a little

more formal at times, especially when she was entertaining his distinguished friends. But he kept that thought to himself and begged to be excused while he wrote his description of the Fancy Dress Ball.

"By Jove," cried Richard nervously, "I hope you won't be too realistic, my dear fellow! Don't give us away too much!"

Harry smiled and promised to use a certain amount of necessary discretion.

"Was it as bad as all that?" asked Kate. "My word, you arouse my maidenly curiosity. Perhaps Richard will give us a private account while you are writing, Harry."

Harry was rather disconcerted by the familiar way in which she called this young aristocrat Richard, as if he were of no more importance than one of the O'Briens in the house opposite. But he remembered that Richard's sister had called him Harry when they had danced together. Perhaps it was all right after all. He went upstairs to concentrate on his article, but it wasn't easy, because he could hear the murmur of voices downstairs—Richard's voice in a monologue interrupted by squeals of laughter from Kate and his mother's more musical expression of amusement. He was obviously giving them a humorous account of last night's scene, in spite of his plea for discretion in the public Press.

He departed in a growler an hour later, having arranged to take Mrs. Verney and Kate to the Derby in his own "turn-out", and also to take a box for a party of his friends to see Kate in her new part.

"A nice young fellow," said Mrs. Verney when he had gone. "He reminds me a good deal of . . ."

"Yes, Mother?" asked Kate, waiting for her to finish the sentence. "Of *whom*, as Dr. Jenkins would say at the Academy for Young Ladies?"

"Oh, well, never mind," said Mrs. Verney. "Clear away those things, Kate. Alice is busy with the joint."

XXVIII

AMONG the articles signed "H.V." in the *Morning Chronicle* was one on a Debate in the House of Commons, and it is interesting not only because it describes an historical scene shortly before the election which defeated Mr. Disraeli's Government, but because, as I know from Harry's letters to Isobel Ingleby—they began about this time—it was a night of importance in his own private life, or at least in that very private sanctuary in which he hid his romantic love for her.

It was entirely a coincidence that Isobel and Lady Alderton accompanied Arthur Mannington to hear this debate in the House on the same night that Harry's Editor—that hairy man—sent him off to write a descriptive account from the Press Gallery.

"It's likely to be amusing," said the Editor, who had warmed towards his young contributor, although he tried to disguise his admiration for Harry's work by sarcasm and irony. "Our wily old Jew is hard pressed, and Gladstone will flay him alive to-night from what I hear. Now run away, my dear lad, and write some of your pigwash while I tell the people of England exactly which way to vote if they have any sense in their skulls, which mostly they haven't."

Harry saw Isobel and her party in the Lobby of the House, and for a moment was tempted to move forward and greet them. But they were looking too grand for him. Arthur Mannington was in evening clothes, with a silk-lined cloak over his arm. Isobel wore her ermine jacket over a white frock which looked like a lovely cloud on the polished floor of the Lobby. Lady Alderton had a beautiful dignity, with a little diadem on her hair. Harry was in his shabby working clothes, having to go to the *Morning Chronicle* after the debate to write his article. He retreated behind a pillar and a policeman's back, trying to escape observation, yet yearning to get one glance from Isobel. She was looking about her with eager interest, and once laid her hand on Arthur Mannington's arm when Mr. Gladstone passed, with

his chin sunk into his high collar but with a straight back and a strong, firm stride as though advancing to give battle.

"It's perfectly true," thought Harry. "I'm a Pariah, as old Esau says. I'm a shabby newspaper reporter. Why the devil should I thrust myself forward into high company? Isobel would be ashamed to acknowledge me in a place like this."

Bitterness entered his heart for a moment, and self-pity. Then he had to make his way to the Press Gallery, and for an hour or two forgot his own personality and sentiment in the drama of this debate.

It was on a subject which seems sadly dull now—the Disestablishment of the Irish Church, endowed and established in a country overwhelmingly Catholic except in the North—but it had aroused religious passion in the country and Mr. Gladstone was forcing his views on behalf of disestablishment in a House of Commons where the Liberals and Radicals and the Irish members—very wild and turbulent on their benches—had combined forces against the Conservatives, who knew in their secret hearts that they had a great body of opinion in the country against them and that the election would play into the hands of their opponents.

It was a full House that night. Harry, looking down from the Press Gallery, could see the closely packed rows of Liberals and Conservatives facing each other, with the Radicals and Irish on the cross benches. Here and there a face was familiar to him from the cartoons of *Punch*—Lord John Manners, the first Commissioner of Works; Gathorne Hardy, the Home Secretary; Sir John Parkington, the War Minister; John Bright, the Radical economist; Bradlaugh, a champion of Free Thought; Robert Lowe, Tory of Tories; but his eyes were fixed mostly on the two chief opponents in this political battle—Mr. Disraeli, sitting on the Government Front Bench, with his top hat tilted over his nose, motionless and sphinxlike, while his enemies attacked him, goaded him, ridiculed him, and vilified him; and on the other side Mr. Gladstone, sitting alert and upright as though ready to jump into the fray at any moment, or turning to whisper to friends on the Front Opposition Bench.

It was an assembly of dignity in dress and demeanour. Apart from some of the Irish members, whose hair was a little too wild, though in keeping with their dark eyes and hollow cheeks and something Celtic and un-English in their cast of face, most of the members belonged to the aristocratic type, or to the new class of rich manufacturers from the North, not without their

own pomposity and dignity, very grave, very stolid, very severe in dress and manner. Their white whiskers gleamed under the gaslights. White shirt-fronts and waistcoats relieved the blackness of the general picture. Many gentlemen kept on their hats at odd angles.

One of the Irish members was gibing at Mr. Disraeli, and arousing outbursts of cheering and laughter on his own benches. He was reminding the right honourable gentleman, the First Lord of the Treasury, of the liberal, the almost radical and revolutionary sentiments which he had expressed as far back as 1844, when he was a friend of liberty, a champion of the oppressed classes, a shocked observer of Irish misery, before he abandoned all his ideals and became the protagonist of reaction, Tory obstruction, religious intolerance, Imperial tyranny, and snobbish indifference to human misfortune.

"The right honourable gentleman, the First Lord of the Treasury," said the Irish member in a strong brogue from County Cork, "was at one time the author of certain novels, much read by the young and ardent intellectuals, in which he painted dark pictures of English poverty, and expressed noble and youthful sentiments for which an Irishman like myself would have been charged with sedition and treason against the Crown and the authority of the Law. I should like to remind him of a speech in which he described, in moving and harrowing terms, the starving population of Ireland, the disgrace of an absentee landlordism and the corruption and absurdity of an alien Church richly endowed to uphold a Protestant form of faith among a Catholic people. Now he has forgotten those generous words. With the cynicism of advancing age he upholds the very evils which he then denounced—that poverty, that disgrace, that corruption. Speaking a word of the Latin tongue—which I understand as well as any gentleman from Oxford, though I pronounce it in a different and more ancient way—I say, with the fullest pity in my heart for a man who has lowered his ideals to suit his political career, *Quantum mutatus ab illo.*"

This oratory was received with a wild outburst of cheering and derisive laughter, not only from the Irish benches, but from those of the Liberals and Radicals.

Several dull gentlemen followed, discussing the project of Irish disestablishment on one side and the other, the Liberal members reproaching Mr. Disraeli for his refusal to move with the spirit of the age, the Tory members attacking Mr. Gladstone for arousing religious controversy, undermining the relations

between Church and State, not only in Ireland but in England, and seeking to weaken the very laws of God.

Then Mr. Gladstone rose, and there was a great hush.

He raised his lionlike head and stretched out an arm towards Mr. Disraeli, who sat still motionless and sphinxlike with his tall hat tilted over his nose.

"I tell the right honourable gentleman, the First Lord of the Treasury," he said in a deep, musical voice which seemed to fill the whole chamber with its organlike vibrations, "that if the Government will not move in this matter, the Opposition will not be content merely with an empty declaration of opinion, but will proceed to *act*."

A storm of cheering from the Liberals, Radicals, and Irish followed this sentence. It was a challenge to battle in the election which was soon approaching. It was more than a challenge. It was a proclamation of faith in victory.

Mr. Gladstone denounced Her Majesty's Government under the leadership of Mr. Disraeli for ignoring the pressure of public opinion which, throughout the country, had shown unmistakable impatience with the delay, the pitiful procrastination of urgent reforms, the dead weight of reaction which had characterized all the acts of the Government since Mr. Disraeli had come into office. In all matters affecting public welfare, the advance of human intelligence, and the divine right of liberty, so priceless a heritage of the human heart, Mr. Disraeli and his supporters had shown themselves callous, cynical, reactionary, and intolerant. He associated himself with the honourable member for Cork (*Loud laughter*) in reminding the right honourable gentleman, the First Lord of the Treasury, of those noble and ardent sentiments which he had expressed as a younger man, and which he now repudiated in the time of his power and in the ripeness of his age. He had renounced liberty for old tyrannies, and the ardour of idealism for the burnt-out ashes of disillusion and decrepitude.

Mr. Gladstone concluded a great speech by a tremendous peroration. His voice dropped to a lower note, quivered with suppressed emotion, while his hand was raised in a kind of prophetic warning, and his eyes had the reddish fire of passion in their depths. (So wrote Harry Verney in the *Morning Chronicle*.)

To the Government on the opposite bench I say this: You cannot fight against the future. Time is on our side. The great social forces which move on in their might and majesty, and which the tumult of our

debate does not for a moment impede or disturb—those great social forces are against you—they are marshalled on our side, as the banner which we now carry, though perhaps at this moment it may droop over our heads, yet soon again will float in the eye of heaven. It will be borne by the firm hands of the united people of the three kingdoms to a certain, but not distant, future.

There was a hush in the Chamber for a moment or two after this solemn passage, concluding a great speech, as though its sublime oratory had overawed the supporters as well as the opponents of Mr. Gladstone.

Then once again the Liberals, Radicals, and Irish cheered with loud and prolonged applause, which was more than an acknowledgment of eloquence but had the fervour of hero-worship. It is doubtful now whether the present House of Commons would be stirred to such enthusiasm by Mr. Gladstone's oratory. Such rhetoric, with its imaginative similes, its long sentences, its prophetic solemnity, has gone out of fashion. But in those days the power of words had not yet lost its spell.

Up in the Press Gallery Harry Verney, reporter of the *Morning Chronicle*, listened to Mr. Gladstone with a beating heart, a breathless excitement, and a sense of revelation. "Time is on our side. You cannot fight against the Future." Those words were a promise to youth inspired by Liberal ideals, with an ardent faith in the progress and righteousness of democratic liberty, not yet apprehensive of that boggy of standardization and of tyranny of the mob mind which has followed the complete fulfilment of victory of those ideals after the intensive struggle of men like Gladstone throughout the Victorian era. He saw the might of the People marching under their banners against the strongholds of intolerance and reaction.

The House waited for Mr. Disraeli's reply, and the last reverberation of the cheering was silenced when he rose slowly, flung away some notes as though disdainful of them, and stood at his place on the Front Bench with an ironical smile twisting his mobile lips. Something of his old dandyism still distinguished his dress. His coat was slightly more waisted than the fashion of the time and had a somewhat deeper collar. His oiled ringlets and Hebraic features gave him a foreign look in that assembly of square-jowled, side-whiskered representatives of the English people. He played with the cord of his monocle, and before he spoke it was apparent that he would not reply to Mr. Gladstone in the same strain of heavy oratory, but with that light, ironical touch of which he was a master. He knew, too, that he was

defending a bad cause, and that it was not an occasion for passionate pleading.

Almost carelessly he defended the Irish policy of his Government as being one of dealing with all such points which were by general agreement sufficiently advanced for legislation. To suggest that the object was delay was, he said, "the lees and refuse of faction's insinuation".

He dealt for a while on the importance of connecting the principle of religion with government, as otherwise political authority would become a mere affair of police. The Irish, he reminded the House, were essentially a religious people, and therefore in favour of ecclesiastical endowment. This great principle was at stake, and Parliament had no moral right to deal with it until after the appeal to the nation—*an appeal which the Government was prepared to hasten.*

This reference to the coming election was received with cheers and counter-cheers, but it was obvious to his own supporters that Mr. Disraeli was speaking without conviction on the subject of debate and was merely playing upon the religious susceptibilities of the assembly for electioneering purposes. There was more interest and amusement when he dealt with the personal charges against him for inconsistency ; and when he came to these passages he thrust out his under lip with that humorous expression which he always adopted in his moods of irony, and smiled with that glassy mirth which lit up his eyes, but did not reveal their inner secrets.

"I do not shrink," he said, "from meeting the challenge which has been thrown down to me, to reconcile my present attitude with my much quoted dictum of 1844 about a starving population, an absentee aristocracy, and an alien Church. With reference to that passage from a speech made by me so long ago, I may remark that it appeared to me at the time as though nobody listened to it. (*Laughter.*) It seemed to me that I was pouring water upon sand, but it seems now that the water came from a golden goblet."

This reference to the old hostility and contempt which had greeted his early speeches in the House of Commons, when he seemed a fantastic and alien figure, aroused general good humour, even among his political opponents.

"With regard to the passage from that speech," he continued blandly, "there are many remarks which, if I wanted to vindicate or defend myself, I might legitimately make. I might remind the House that that speech was made before the Famine and the

emigration from Ireland, and the whole of that passage about the starving people no longer applies. . . . All this I might say, but I do not care to say it, and I do not wish to say it, because in my conscience the sentiment of that speech was right. It may have been expressed with the heedless rhetoric which, I suppose, is the apanage of all who sit below the gangway, but in my historical conscience the sentiment of that speech still stands."

The debate dragged on, and Harry slipped away from the Press Gallery to write his column. He was going out by way of Westminster Hall, thrilled for a moment by historical memories of all the scenes that had passed under its old roof—that never-to-be-forgotten scene of the trial of King Charles—when he felt a light touch on his sleeve and heard a laughing voice behind him.

"Harry ! . . . How nice to see you again !"

It was Lady Isobel Ingleby in her little ermine jacket and white cloudlike frock.

She had run after him, leaving her people in a group above the flight of steps.

Harry was speechless for a moment, and abashed by his shabbiness and shyness. He was aware only that he was holding a little white-gloved hand which lingered in his.

"A great debate," he said, with a struggle to regain composure. "Were you interested ?"

"Beyond words !" she told him. "It was thrilling. I adore that speech by Mr. Gladstone. 'Time is on our side.' . . . 'The great social forces move on in their might and majesty.' . . . Oh, Harry, wasn't that splendid ? I can't pretend to be a Tory any more, although I do have an affectionate regard for dear Mr. Disraeli !"

"They were very noble words," said Harry. "I shall never forget them."

She insisted upon his coming back to see her mother and Arthur, and only laughed when he pleaded his shabbiness, and held him tight by the wrist as a captor.

"You must come, Harry. Mamma would be very hurt if you avoided her, and Arthur admires your articles so much ! As for me, I rush for the *Morning Chronicle* on Fridays."

He could not refuse, and stood for a few minutes trying to feel at ease, or at least to hide his absurd shyness in the presence of Lady Alderton and the elegant Arthur. They were very gracious and kind, as he had to admit, and not once did Arthur

Mannington seem to notice his shabby suit and ill-brushed top hat, which had been roughly dealt with in the Press Gallery by other reporters elbowing it.

"I do envy you writing about this debate," said Arthur Mannington. "What a great power it gives you! More than any Member of Parliament can hope to have, unless he has Cabinet rank!"

"Oh, I only do a descriptive account," answered Harry, who was nothing if not modest.

"But such description!" said Isobel with enthusiasm. "You see everything, Harry! You get beneath the surface. And it is all so human!"

Harry blushed deeply with pleasure and self-consciousness. Such words were heady wine to him.

"I am afraid we must be going," said Lady Alderton presently.

Harry walked with them to Palace Yard, where their carriage was waiting with its cockaded footmen.

Isobel gave him a message before she went into its depths.

"Give my love to your sister Kate. Will she let me call on her again? To-morrow, for instance?"

"Nothing would please her more," said Harry.

"And you will be there?"

"Yes, if you will come."

She flashed a smile at him as her mother called out to her not to keep the horses waiting.

"Thanks a thousand times for looking after Richard," she whispered, and then by some miracle was wafted into the carriage in her filmy frock.

The footmen shut the carriage door and jumped up behind. The horses' hoofs struck sparks out of the cobblestones. The red-spoked wheels rolled away with the vision of Isobel's beauty, which remained in the eyes and soul of a shabby young man standing bareheaded in Palace Yard.

XXIX

I HAVE the assurance of an old lady that, as a girl, she had no intention of running after a young man in whom she was very much interested. There is no need to doubt that assurance or to analyse it very closely, but the fact remains that Isobel Ingleby and Harry Verney met each other more frequently at this time than was quite discreet for either of them, considering their difference in social status and the conventions of their period in English history. My own feeling is that it was the lady who made these meetings possible by her eagerness to escape from the restrictions of her own home and to see more of life in an unfettered way than was allowed by her social code.

Possibly her meetings with Harry arose out of chance observations in their talks about art and drama and amusing aspects of London life. When he expressed surprise that she had never seen the Velasquez portraits in the National Gallery it was natural for her to suggest that they might meet there one day so that he might be her guide. It was even more natural that he should suggest the following Wednesday afternoon. The same thing occurred regarding the waxworks at Madame Tussaud's. She had an ambition to see the tableau of Lady Jane Grey and a portrait model of Queen Elizabeth. Nothing, of course, would induce her to visit the Chamber of Horrors, which really must be *too* dreadful, she thought.

Then Kate and her mother were always able to obtain tickets for the Haymarket and one or two other theatres, and after her first rapture over *Caste* she could not resist the temptation to see other plays. As Kate was engaged on Wednesday *matinées* she was very glad to give her place to Isobel, and there were times when Mrs. Verney did not care to go, so that Miss Venables acted as chaperon in her place with Harry as the other party.

Isobel also developed an enthusiasm for the Greek and Roman rooms in the British Museum, which, curiously enough, was shared by Harry Verney, although up to that time he had not

been greatly allured by Roman fibulæ, Etruscan pots, and Greek statuary. There were also many churches in London which were worthy of exploration by historical students, such as St. Bartholomew the Great, All Hallows, Barking, and Chelsea Old Church, so intimately associated with Sir Thomas More.

One cannot blame Isobel for desiring to increase her knowledge in these directions. One certainly cannot blame Harry for wishing to give her the benefit of his historical studies. It was delightful, they thought, that they were so much interested in the same kind of thing. Why, therefore, should they not meet in these places and compare notes? Why not, indeed?—though Miss Venables, loyal in the service of Lord Alderton, faithful comrade of Isobel, and most virtuous of chaperons, became more and more distressed at the frequency of these innocent rendezvous.

She was "torn between conflicting emotions", as the novelists of that day used to write of their heroes and heroines. She had a great liking for Mr. Henry Verney. She was perfectly sure in her own mind that he was a young man of the *highest* moral character. She agreed with Isobel that he was charming, modest, and extremely well informed. He was always a pattern of courtesy towards herself, very solicitous lest she should be fatigued, and delightful in the way he asked for her opinion on subjects like the influence of Roman civilization in early Britain or the art of Mr. G. F. Watts, for whom she had a great reverence and respect. On the other hand, she trembled with fear lest these frequent meetings between such a nice young man and her beautiful Isobel might lead to a sentimental attachment which could result in nothing but unhappiness. She had other causes for fear equally acute. If his lordship should ever get to hear of Isobel's visits to the theatre, either with Mrs. Verney or herself as chaperon, he would regard it as an unpardonable crime of disobedience and deceit.

It is no wonder, then, that Miss Venables was conscience-stricken, and so distressed by inward conflict that her hand trembled sometimes when she held it out to Mr. Verney on his appearance at some place which Isobel had insisted on visiting without any reference to him. She could not hide from herself, either, that Isobel was artful in providing pretexts for private conversation with this young man. In the British Museum, for instance, she would call to Miss Venables to examine a beautiful specimen of Etruscan pottery and then very rapidly depart with Mr. Verney to another room. Once Miss Venables lost them both for over half an hour after she had been lured by Isobel to look

at the Egyptian mummies. And when that young lady reappeared with Mr. Verney by her side with such a shining light in his eyes that it was almost alarming, she cried out with pretended surprise and said she had been looking for Miss Venables everywhere and really thought she must have been whisked away to the Nile by some Egyptian ghost. A most dreadful idea, which caused Miss Venables to have a bad dream that night.

It happened again at Madame Tussaud's. Miss Venables was wrapped in contemplation of a wax model of the late Prince Consort, whom she had once seen in the Great Exhibition. It was really lifelike, and she gazed at it with admiration amounting to hero-worship. In the dim light of the room, in which only the models were illuminated by gas-jets, she imagined that Isobel and Mr. Verney were still by her side, and she was greatly distressed to find that they had slipped away and utterly disappeared. She searched for them at the tableau of Lady Jane Grey and in the room where Joan of Arc was being burnt, and in front of the panorama of the Great Fire of London. After an hour's search she became almost hysterical, imagining dreadful things that might have happened to these two young people. They might have been lured away and murdered behind some secret door, or thrust into a dungeon and held up to ransom. As a girl she had read of such horrors in romantic fiction published by the Minerva Press, and these childish phobias loomed up in her simple soul again. Then she saw Isobel smiling and waving to her in the central hall.

"Venny! Where *have* you been? Mr. Verney and I have been searching for you like a needle in a haystack."

"Oh, my dear," cried Miss Venables, "I have been terribly frightened! Why did you slip away from me like that? It was not kind. I really must beg of you not to do it again."

"But, my dear Venny, we did not slip away. We lost you in the darkness. Did we not, Harry?"

"Perfectly true," agreed Harry. "But we're dreadfully sorry, Miss Venables. I had no idea you would be frightened."

All their explanations were wrecked for Miss Venables when she discovered through a chance word from Isobel that she had gone into the Chamber of Horrors downstairs, unable to resist the temptation of that appalling exhibition. She had been foolish enough to feel a little faint. Mr. Verney had taken her into a room provided for that purpose and had sat with her until she felt better.

There was an even more regrettable episode when Miss

Venables was taken ill with the mumps. Goodness alone knows how she contracted that very unpleasant and even painful malady, but she suspected that she had picked it up from a child at the Foundling Hospital where she accompanied Lady Alderton on prize day. It made her astonishingly like Queen Victoria in her latter years, and Isobel could not forbear laughing at her a little, although she was full of sympathy and condolence. Needless to say, Miss Venables could not go out with a face which had swollen to twice its normal size, and that was unfortunate, because Isobel had made a very particular engagement to visit the Tower of London, for which Harry had obtained a special Press ticket, enabling him "and friends" to see the dungeons, including the cell once occupied by Guy Fawkes and other places not open to the ordinary public. One of Isobel's favourite romances as a younger girl had been *The Tower of London*, by G. P. R. James, and she had been looking forward to this visit with special eagerness.

"Of course, dearest one," said Miss Venables, speaking with some difficulty because of her swollen glands, "you will postpone the visit to the Tower. I am so sorry to be such a nuisance."

"My darling Venny," cried Isobel, "you are *never* a nuisance! You ought to know by this time how much I love you. And just to show you that you are *not* a nuisance in the very least degree I shall not postpone my visit. I will just pop into a hansom and meet Mr. Verney at his little house in Royal Avenue. Then we shall go on by Underground Railway from Bishop's Road to Farringdon Street, for the sake of a new experience."

Miss Venables gave a cry of dismay.

"Isobel! The Underground Railway? And alone with a gentleman? Surely you must have taken leave of your senses. I shall have to speak to his lordship if you persist in such a dreadful intention. Or at least it will be my duty to tell your dear Mamma. The very *lowest* people travel in the Underground. I have never been in such a place in my life. I believe it is positively dangerous, besides being vulgar to the very last degree."

Isobel tried to reassure her about the perfect respectability and propriety of the Underground, which was then in process of construction.

"Why, Venny, don't be silly. Many City gentlemen go that way every day and come out alive at the other end."

"You might be assaulted by roughs," said Miss Venables tearfully. "In any case, to travel alone with a young man—to spend several hours with him at the Tower—perhaps to be seen

by one of your friends—might ruin your reputation for life. I implore you to refrain from such an improper, such a compromising thing. I *beg* of you, my dear, with tears in my eyes.”

“Very well, then, Venny, we will say no more about it. I should hate to worry you.”

Isobel said no more about it. She pretended that she had forgotten all about it, and was wonderfully kind and sympathetic about the mumps up to the very last moment of the afternoon appointed for the visit to the Tower. She lent Miss Venables a new novel by Charles Reade, entitled *Griffith Gaunt*, a remarkable and enthralling story about a bigamist, and it was only when her dear Venny dozed over its pages that she slipped away, walked very rapidly to the other side of Belgrave Square, and hailed a passing hansom. . . .

The Underground Railway from Bishop's Road to Farringdon Street, opened in 1863, was not so amusing as Isobel had anticipated, even in the company of Harry Verney. They were both nearly choked by the sulphurous fumes, and Isobel was so alarmed by the darkness of the tunnel that she had to clutch Harry's hand and was glad of his heroic courage in this very dangerous adventure. But it was delightful to get into the open air again, and to walk to the Tower through many alleys and narrow streets which Harry seemed to know like an open book. The Tower itself was, of course, thrillingly romantic, and Isobel could not restrain a few tears down in the dungeons and in the Bloody Tower, where so many poor men and women—the heroic blood of England—had languished and died by the executioner's axe or through disease and despair.

Was there any evil in these jaunts with a young literary gentleman who had read his history? Were they even a pretext for flirtation and philandering? I am convinced that neither on Isobel's side nor on Harry's was there any conscious approach to amorous or sentimental situations. They talked quite sensibly about the historical associations of these places; they made comments about their fellow sightseers; they found cause for smiles and even laughter in little incidents of the most trivial kind—the tilt of a man's hat, the colour of a lady's bonnet, the Cockney slang of a London cabby; they were enthusiastic about their favourite authors; they agreed delightfully in their ideas about Liberalism and popular education and the need for better conditions of labour for working people. They deplored the lack of beauty in mean streets and the brutality and drunkenness

which could hardly be avoided on their way through London. Mother Grundy, in her full panoply and power at that time, could not have overheard one word of impropriety or indiscretion exchanged between Isobel Ingleby and Harry Verney had she listened to all their conversation.

And yet one can see the danger of it for both of them. Their very innocence of intent betrayed them into an affectionate comradeship which, on Harry's side at least, was already touched by a romantic worship ready—though he dared not admit it to himself—to flame into passionate love, but for his clear awareness of the social gulf dividing them. He suffered already from heartache and vague sensations of desire and anguish, caused by Isobel's charming little flatteries and her sense of safety with him. Sometimes when they were talking she put her hand through his arm as if she were his sister, not knowing how exquisite was the thrill she gave him. She had a habit of turning her face to him and looking him in the eyes with a flutter of lashes, and he could hardly bear that smiling gaze.

He went back home to the little house in Royal Avenue with a sense of spiritual intoxication, so silent and preoccupied in the presence of his mother that she accused him of being "sulky". Both from his mother and Kate he hid the fact that he had been out with Isobel Ingleby, unless it was strictly necessary to tell them, because they would find out anyhow. He was afraid of their chaff, and especially of Kate's sharp tongue and unrestrained humour. Once or twice already she had accused him of being "sweet" on the Lady Isobel of the Moated Grange, and had pitied Alice Calthrop, who was desperately "gone" on him, poor child. "Sweet" on her! The word seemed to him insultingly vulgar.

"Kate," he said angrily, "I wish to goodness you wouldn't use stage slang in private life. Do try to behave like a lady."

Kate made a comical face at him.

"Haughty, aren't we?" she jeered. "Since we have been taken up by the Aristocracy we have to be very careful of our manners, don't we? . . . And that reminds me that Richard has invited Alice Calthrop and me to drive down to Richmond with him in his tandem. No room for you, Harry, alas!"

It is curious that Harry—one of the champions of liberty, who saw nothing wrong in spending an afternoon alone with a lady—should have felt a sense of uneasiness and impropriety in the idea of his sister and Alice Calthrop driving down to Richmond with Isobel's brother.

"I don't think Mother ought to let you go," he said. "People might talk. One has to be careful."

Kate ruffled his hair as he sat over his papers.

"'A plague of all cowards!'" she cried. "'Give me a cup o sack, boy!'"

XXX

THERE was no need for Harry to feel anxious about his sister Kate with reference to Richard, Viscount Ingleby. She had a shrewd little head on her shoulders and her heart was already engaged secretly to a young actor named Thistlewood, playing with her at the Haymarket Theatre and living not more than a few minutes' walk from her in Chelsea, having a bed-sitting room in Cheyne Walk next door to Thomas Carlyle, whom he annoyed more than once by reciting his parts in his upper room, which happened to be only a wall away from where the Sage was writing his enormous and misguided work on Frederick the Great.

This engagement of the heart was not conclusive on Kate's part, because she had already been in love with one of the young O'Briens in the house opposite, with one of the Terry boys, and with John Calthrop, brother of her great friend Alice who was "gone" on Harry, not to mention more childish passions in previous years for a young Italian organ-grinder who came with his monkey to Royal Avenue every Tuesday, and one of the assistants in Gorrings who always attended to her mother when they went shopping. But for a time, anyhow, her attachment to young Thistlewood, who had to kiss her hand every evening before the public and very much wanted to kiss her cheek behind the scenes—she utterly refused to let him without a desperate struggle—was some kind of insurance that she would not lose her head over the elegant Richard. But she was quite pleased when he called for her now and then in a very smart-looking cart with a high-stepping horse which struck sparks out of the pavement in Royal Avenue, and drove out to Richmond and other pleasant places. He was perfectly agreeable to include a girl like Alice Calthrop in the invitation, especially when he saw that Alice was the prettiest thing in Chelsea, with the notable exception of Miss Kate Verney.

On Derby Day he graciously invited Mrs. Verney and Harry as well as Kate and Alice Calthrop to share seats on a private coach he had hired from Tattersall's at great expense. The

jaunt was to be kept rather private, because his honoured father had very strong views about the immorality of horse-racing and betting, and was already getting perturbed, or "fractious", as Richard called it, because his son and heir had exceeded his allowance by several hundred pounds.

"There's bound to be a row," Richard confided to Kate in his boyish way. "My only hope of escape from parental wrath is a twenty to one chance on Red Slippers. I had a tip on it from Teddy Black, the featherweight champion, who knows Archer, the jockey. Archer told him to put his shirt on it."

"What for?" asked Kate. "To keep it warm, do you mean?"

Richard laughed loudly at this charming innocence, not knowing that Kate knew perfectly well what he meant, having already been advised that Mr. Thistlewood intended to put his shirt on Champagne Charlie.

Harry was glad to get a seat on Richard's private coach, having been instructed to write a description of Derby Day for the *Morning Chronicle*. But he was troubled because Isobel was left out of the party. Not even she had the temerity to go to the Derby without her parents' consent, for which she had pleaded, only to obtain a stern refusal from her father.

"On no account, Isobel. It is an orgy of vice and drunkenness. No modest girl ought to look at the scenes which take place on the roads. They are utterly disgusting, my dear—the lowest rabble of England giving themselves up to every expression of vulgarity and abomination."

"But, Papa, half the Aristocracy will be there!"

"I agree," said his lordship. "More's the pity. I am one of the few peers who will not be there."

Isobel did not dare tell him of Richard's private coach and the party he was taking. For a few wild moments of secret rebellion she wondered whether she could "slip away", as Miss Venables called it, and have a merry day without being found out. Harry would be there. It would be nice to sit next to him and watch him take notice of everything—all of which he would write down in his article for the *Morning Chronicle*. She might point out some of her father's friends. He would put them in as the Earl of B——, or the Duke of M——, with some comical touch of caricature. And she could laugh at all the sights with Kate, who laughed so easily at everything. Then there would be a picnic lunch with pork pies and champagne; and, most exciting of all, she might get Harry to make a bet for her on one of the

horses so that she would be breathless for her favourite to win, although of course she didn't need the money.

"Papa," she said petulantly, "why do you keep me out of so much fun which other people enjoy? It makes life so—difficult."

She had never spoken to her father like that before, and he looked up sharply from his copy of *The Times*.

"I hope you are not being disrespectful, Isobel?"

"No, Papa, certainly not."

"Very well, then. Kindly obey my wishes. Life is not made for fun. We are sent here to do our duty and to serve God."

"Yes, but I am sure God wants us to be happy, Papa. In innocent ways, of course! I do not think He would disapprove of the Derby. The Prince of Wales will be there."

"The Prince has to do many unpleasant things for the sake of his position," said his lordship. "And I am shocked, Isobel, to hear you mention our Lord in connection with a horse-race."

"But, Papa, you know you are very fond of horses. I believe you are reading the racing news now."

She had glanced over his shoulder and seen a column in *The Times* with the heading of "The Derby Race".

His lordship flushed heavily and dropped *The Times* on to the hassock by the fireplace.

"One has to read things of which one disapproves," he explained rather lamely. "But I am afraid you are being impertinent, Isobel."

"Papa, you treat me as a child!" exclaimed Isobel hotly. Her cheeks burned with a sudden passionate emotion, and without another word she swept out of the room, her lips pressed tight, and an angry glitter in her bright eyes.

She had complained of being treated like a child, but, as she admitted afterwards, she behaved childishly in bursting into tears outside her father's study because she had been denied a pleasure like a little schoolgirl forbidden to go to a party.

So trivial an episode, as it now seems, altered the whole plot of her life and affected very gravely the happiness of two young men, strange as it may seem, if we do not remember how often a triviality like this turns the scales in human values. If Isobel Ingleby had not been so passionately disappointed on this Derby Day she might not have been so cold to Arthur Mannington when he came to dinner that evening with an engagement ring in the left pocket of his waistcoat, nor so utterly convinced that her heart was irrevocably given to Harry Verney.

Harry himself had no psychical knowledge of Isobel's un-

happiness while he thoroughly enjoyed himself on the way to the Derby. At first, it is true, he was rather silent and introspective as he sat by the side of Alice Calthrop on Richard's expensive-looking coach, with Kate on the box seat next to Richard himself, who drove four high-spirited horses with ease and elegance. Harry's mother sat behind with Mrs. Calthrop. He regretted that Isobel had been left out of this adventure. He was slightly embarrassed that he should be put next to Alice Calthrop, who was supposed to be "gone" on him, and with whom he had had certain sentimental episodes in more youthful days.

He had kissed her under the mistletoe at more than one Christmas party when they had played forfeits with the Terry family and other friends. He had skated with her on the Round Pond at Clapham Common during some hard weeks of frost a few years before, and she had tickled his neck when he put on her skates. He had kept a little portrait of her, cut out of black paper at the Crystal Palace one day, and had pinned it over his writing-desk until Isobel had come into his life.

Now he would have to let her know by a slight coldness and a certain distance of manner that he was not of a "coming on" disposition. Of course he would always be friendly and brotherly, but nothing more.

This attempt to be polite and distant with Alice Calthrop broke down after the first few miles out of London. It was absurd, really, and unnecessary. Alice was wildly excited by the scenes on the road, and did not notice his frigidity. She kept calling his attention to humorous characters and outrageous comicalities in the endless procession on the way to Epsom, where the traffic was held up at every cross road and where coaches laden with beauty and fashion were stopped for ten minutes at a time by the breakdown of a donkey-cart or a general mix-up of wheels and shafts and kicking horses.

"Oh, Harry, do look at that funny couple driving that poor little donkey! The man is wearing the girl's hat! And what a hat! Did you ever see such flaming feathers?"

She tucked her hand through his arm, utterly unaware that he was disconcerted by this gesture of comradeship.

"Oh, Harry, look at that young man driving a tandem! The front horse has turned round to laugh at the one behind! Oh, it has just put its right leg over the traces! The young man is blushing furiously—holding up the whole procession. Isn't it terribly funny?"

She gave a little scream of mirth when a party of coster girls with enormous feathers in their hats joined the procession from a side-road, in a cart driven by a young coster in the full regalia of his professional calling—short jacket and bell-bottomed trousers heavily embroidered with pearl buttons. Two girls were blowing paper trumpets with indescribable noise, while the others were calling out humorous insults to the “swells” on the coaches.

“Nah then, Charlie, tike that bit o’ glass out of your eye! Percy, dear fellah, give the lidy a kiss, only mind the bloomin’ paint on ’er cheek!”

Kate was behaving very naughtily on the box seat, laughing at young men who kissed their hands to her, waving back to costers who kissed their whips to her, and exchanging greetings with unknown people on a coach which preceded them.

Richard in white top hat and fawn-coloured coat, with a carnation in his buttonhole, did incredible things with his team of horses, passing other vehicles with a hair’s breadth to spare, getting between a double line of traffic at imminent risk of jammed wheels, even whipping them up to a gallop for a hundred yards or so on the other side of Merton, where the road was not so congested for just that length. Several times he kissed his whip to other drivers—young gentlemen who had been with him at Oxford and now greeted him from high dog-carts or barouches driven by portly coachmen with liveried footmen standing behind, or open landaus containing their lady mothers and younger beauties.

Every vehicle imaginable was on the road, some of them as old as the Georgian era, with heavy wheels and enormous springs, some of them belonging to the England of Mr. Pickwick, with Tony Weller on the box, purple-faced, in box coats heavily pleated and high stocks round apoplectic necks. Some of them were more ancient than that—looking as though they might have belonged to country squires in the Restoration period, when the Merry Monarch drove past their manor houses with my Lady Castlemaine. Between the great coaches, on which scarlet-coated men played on the post-horns so that the air was rent with brass melodies, came vegetable carts drawn by sturdy mokes, fast-trotting gigs, furniture-vans laden with swarming families, gipsy caravans, and coster carts which ambled along the road to Epsom to the music of concertinas, Jew’s harps, penny whistles, and toy trumpets. Large numbers of the horses were clad in ladies’ drawers according to ancient custom and vulgar humour, and every time one of these came into view Alice Calthrop blushed furiously and laughed irresistibly.

"Oh, Harry, isn't that absurd? I really don't think it ought to be allowed!"

Harry had been sulky and silent for the first mile or two, but all this rowdiness, good humour, and comedy of English life broke down his reserve. He laughed heartily at the Cockney remarks shouted at them over the tails of tired little mokes. His eyes were lighted up by this moving drama of horseflesh and beauty. Elegant young ladies in little jackets of the brightest colours above their hooped frocks, with tiny hats perched impudently above their chignons, smiled at him from their high seats, and even kissed their hands to him. It was impossible to be grumpy with the sun of a June morning shining down on such a scene. It was impossible to be "distant" with Alice Calthrop, who tucked her hand through his arm and was the prettiest and most excited little lady on the road. He could not even feel very angry with Kate for singing "D'ye ken John Peel" on the box seat.

Richard Ingleby was a charming and generous host. He had provided a meal fit for the gods. Champagne corks popped like the fire of a Gatling-gun. There were piles of ham sandwiches; his pork pies gleamed golden in the sunshine on the heath where there were long lines of coaches drawn up along the course. He flung handfuls of coppers to gipsy urchins who turned Catherine wheels on the grass, and crossed with silver the palms of gipsy women who told Kate's fortune and prophesied that the lucky lady would marry a lucky gentleman with golden whiskers, although she must beware of a dark gentleman who would cross her path. The bookmakers bawled unceasingly and declared their readiness to give odds of twenty to one on Red Slippers or fifteen to one on Champagne Charlie, or ten to one on the field. . . .

I am writing this, curiously enough, on Derby Day of 1931. There are many motor-cars on the roads to-day, and aeroplanes flying over the course before the race, but the scene has not changed very much on Epsom Downs since Harry went there with Alice Calthrop. On this day of the year, on this heath, the spirit of old England still comes up from the past, with its sporting instincts, its love of horses, its vulgarity, its good humour, its strange human medley of democracy and aristocracy, its comedy of manners.

"Notwithstanding the rapid changes under which we live, and the alterations which we anticipate," said Mr. Disraeli, before Progress had trampled over so many fields of beauty, "this

country is still Old England, and the past is one of the elements of our power. . . ."

The gipsies' caravans are still there. The cuckoo is calling in the copse beyond Tattenham Corner. There is the same smell of damp turf. "There's the wind on the heath, brother", and among the crowds of people in modern dress there are many ghosts of young "swells" and beauties in hooped dresses who became the grandfathers and grandmothers of our own generation. Harry's ghost is there to-day, as in 1868 he sat laughing with Alice Calthrop when she spread a napkin over their knees and cried out with ecstasy at the sight of a pork pie. Their knees touched, and he did not draw away because of his love for the absent Isobel. He was not inhuman in his priggishness.

Kate had put a pound both ways on Champagne Charlie, but Harry received a shock which took the sunlight out of the sky for a moment when she whispered to him that Richard had backed Red Slippers for a hundred and fifty pounds.

"Incredible!" said Harry in a low voice. "It's absolute madness!"

"It makes everything terribly exciting," whispered Kate. "'Ruin stared the young nobleman in the face', as they say in the *Bow Bells Novelette*."

It didn't look as though ruin stared him in the face at that moment. He was twisting the wire from another champagne cork, with which he took aim at the top hat of a young sportsman on the next coach. It was a wonderful hit, and Richard laughed uproariously at his victim, who thought he had been shot.

But he became very tense shortly before the great race.

"Wish me luck, Kate," he said. "If Red Slippers doesn't pass the post first there'll be some heated words in Belgrave Square when I present a statement of account to my honoured father!"

"But what about Champagne Charlie?" cried Kate. "My whole fortune of twenty shillings!"

Generously, however, she hoped Red Slippers would win, and clutched Richard's arm when far away they could see the horses lining up for the start.

"Don't they look beautiful?" cried Alice Calthrop, holding on to Harry. "I expect the jockeys feel dreadfully excited, poor boys."

"Red Slippers is behaving admirably," said Richard with a tremor in his voice. "Perfect form!"

Mrs. Verney and Mrs. Calthrop had brought their opera-

glasses and now searched the scene, not to study the horses' form, but to get a glimpse of the Prince of Wales and many lords and ladies in the Royal stand.

"The dear Prince is putting on flesh," said Mrs. Calthrop tenderly.

"Surely that is Lord John Russell?" exclaimed Mrs. Verney. "I always call him Lord John since he came to see me in *Dick Whittington* at Drury Lane twenty-five years ago. A dear little man, but looking very old now."

Down by the rails the bookmakers were yelling the last odds. Mounted policemen cantered up the course driving back some stragglers. There was a surging tumult behind the rails, the crowd shouting and laughing as they shoved forward for a better view. Then suddenly there was a shout of "They're off!" followed by a sudden hush, when for the first time one could hear the larks singing above the heath.

Mrs. Verney pushed her opera-glasses into Harry's hand and he stood unaware of self or selfishness with his eyes glued to them. He could see the twinkle of the jockeys' caps and their parti-coloured jackets. It was his first Derby, and, as a journalist who would have to write about it afterwards, he was utterly absorbed in the drama of the race. Red Slippers was away a head in front of Champagne Charlie. The other horses were coming along in a bunch before streaming out in single file.

"Red Slippers!" came a shout from the crowd.

"Hooray!" cried Richard Ingleby, staring through his field-glasses.

But Champagne Charlie was only a neck behind, and kept close to his rival.

"Come on, Charlie!" cried Kate, forgetting her promise to wish for the victory of Red Slippers.

Several horses pulled ahead, shortening the distance between themselves and the two who were leading the race. They bunched again at Tattenham Corner. An outsider had come into view . . . was only a neck behind Red Slippers . . . was only a head behind . . . was dead level!

The crowd was strangely and uncannily silent, holding its breath as though it had only one pair of lungs. Then suddenly there was a tremendous yell, hoarse and thrilling.

"Blue Gown wins!"

"Oh, my sacred aunt!" said Mr. Richard Ingleby.

"Blue Gown . . . Red Slippers . . . Blue Gown . . . Blue Gown . . . BLUE GOWN!"

It was Blue Gown that won the Derby. Red Slippers was second. Champagne Charlie was nowhere.

"Oh, Richard," cried Kate, putting her hand on Richard's arm, "I'm so sorry! How terrible for you! Will you really be ruined?"

"Irretrievably," answered that young man.

For a moment he was white to the lips. But that was due to excitement rather than to imminent ruin.

"Will some kind lady give me a kiss?" he asked, like a small boy who has just received a whipping. "I feel that I want to weep on my mother's bosom, and at the moment I haven't got a mother."

Kate kissed him in full view of a hundred thousand people, which really was a kind and generous act of great unconventionality in Victorian England.

"Kate!" cried Alice Calthrop, laughing at her and blushing. "You really are naughty!"

"Well, poor boy," said Kate, "someone ought to be kind to him. Fancy losing all that money on a silly horse! And I haven't had any luck either. Twenty shillings that I'll never see again."

"Kate, darling," said Mrs. Verney good-naturedly, not at all shocked at the episode of the kiss, "do tidy yourself up and smooth your frock down. It's all crumpled, and the ribbon has come up from your bodice."

"Another glass of champagne, ladies," suggested Richard Ingleby. "Let us drown our sorrows in drink."

Within five minutes he was restored to his former good humour, and Harry, who had been alarmed at his great loss, realized that it did not mean ruin—though it might mean a row—to the son of Lord Alderton.

They started early on the way back to town because Kate had to be at the theatre before eight. Alice Calthrop was tired after so much excitement, and her head drooped on to Harry's shoulder while she cuddled close to him. He hadn't the heart to draw away from her, especially as on the other side of Mitcham she fell asleep. But he was thinking of Isobel Ingleby.

XXXI

WHILE Kate was playing the part of a skittish young thing at the Haymarket Theatre with Mr. Thistlewood, who had lost his shirt on Champagne Charlie, and while Harry was writing his descriptive account of the Derby for the *Morning Chronicle*, Isobel was facing an emotional crisis of no trivial kind.

Arthur had sent a note round from St. James's Square by one of his father's footmen, addressed to Lady Alderton, and inviting himself to dinner. It was obvious to Isobel that the letter contained a more notable communication, because her mother did not show it to her, and seemed rather nervous after reading it in the drawing-room, where she sat doing a woolwork mat to put under the wax flowers and glass dome on the table by the window. Isobel, who was still smarting from a sense of injury at being forbidden to go to the Derby with her friends, was pretending to read a book, but was well aware that from time to time her mother's glance was upon her, perturbed by her silence and ill humour.

"Arthur is coming to dinner," said Lady Alderton when the note was delivered.

Isobel gave an almost imperceptible shrug of her shoulders.

"How entertaining!" she said, hating herself for her own sulkiness yet unable to overcome it.

A little later she made another remark not quite amiable or polite.

"It seems to take Arthur a good many words to notify the honour of his visit. Is he giving you the latest political information, Mamma?"

It was then that Lady Alderton looked a little nervous and put the letter under her work-basket.

"Just a chatty little note," she explained hurriedly.

Isobel guessed perfectly easily that Arthur was writing to her mother to enlist her aid in turning an informal engagement into a formal one, with an early marriage to follow. She had an intuition amounting to certainty that Arthur had invited

himself to dinner for the purpose of bringing pressure to bear on his proposal, and she had no doubt whatever on the subject when she heard a carriage drive up, the hall bell ring, and for half an hour afterwards the murmur of Arthur's and her father's voices in the study below.

"They are deciding my future life," she thought. "Arthur is asking Papa to support his suit for my lily-white hand. He is going into details regarding his financial prospects, and Papa is being very generous about my dowry. Arthur is very much touched by Papa's nobility and affection. Papa is very much pleased by Arthur's modesty and candour. And neither of them has the least idea that I may be in love with somebody else, and that anyhow I will not have my life arranged for me as though my feelings and happiness were to be taken for granted if Papa says so. After all, we *are* living in the Victorian era. Women cannot be treated like slaves any longer, even if they do have the misfortune to belong to the Upper Classes."

She worked herself up into a little passion, though she sat with her eyes on an open book—*The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*—not reading a word.

"Do you not think you had better go and dress, darling?" asked her mother. "Dinner will be served in half an hour now, and Arthur will be disappointed if he comes up and finds that you are not ready yet."

"Arthur's disappointment will not ruffle his self-complacency," said Isobel coldly, hating herself more than ever for this ill-temper, but unable to control it because of some black and malign spirit spoiling her natural good nature and her sense of humour.

She flounced out of the room, leaving Lady Alderton much perturbed. It was the first time she had ever heard Isobel say a word against Arthur, of all people in the world. She had watched their boy and girl friendship with tenderness and pleasure. There had been no surprise to her when Arthur had spoken to his lordship begging permission to make a proposal of marriage.

Her only surprise, her utter bewilderment, indeed, was Isobel's strange reluctance to become formally engaged, and a kind of rebellion against the thought of marriage. Of course women had to submit to marriage, in spite of its many hardships and terrors; life had no other meaning or purpose for them than that—in the faith and tradition of Alice, Lady Alderton.

Arthur Mannington was quite unconscious of Isobel's coldness when she came down just as the gong was being sounded for

dinner. He kissed her hand and admired her frock of embroidered muslin. He put her silence down to a headache caused by the heat of the day, and during dinner gave a vivacious account of his electioneering. He had made a speech from the hustings and had scored a considerable success in spite of some heckling from Tory opponents. His father's tenants had shown themselves very loyal and intelligent. His Liberal principles had not alarmed them. On the contrary, they were all on the side of Progress.

"More fools they, my dear Arthur!" said his lordship with genial disagreement. "You cannot expect me to swallow that kind of stuff, even though I want to be tolerant. Progress? In what direction? Towards the rabble mind, towards anarchy and treason, towards the barefaced robbery of the rich, to support the idleness and greed of the ne'er-do-weels?"

Arthur laughed with his usual good-nature.

"We have agreed to differ, sir! Pardon me for proclaiming my Liberal faith. I merely wished to give you some account of my electioneering adventures. Really it was too comical when some of the young farmers accepted my invitation to address the crowd. They were fine types, all the same. Sturdy and independent and patriotic—but alarmingly shy and self-conscious. There was one young fellow——"

He told an amusing story about that one young fellow and Isobel rewarded it with a pale smile which satisfied the storyteller, amused by his own narrative and unconscious of any coldness from the lady of his love.

Isobel was contrasting him with Harry. . . . Arthur belonged to the aristocratic type, sure of his own importance in the scheme of things, with a sense of inherited authority, and with no anxiety about his financial position. He had been born with a golden spoon in his mouth. One day he would be a peer and take his place in the House of Lords. Harry belonged to the Middle Class. He was desperately poor. He would have to fight his way up. And he was shy, self-conscious and diffident, and romantic. Arthur had ideals, but Harry had dreams. Arthur was highly educated, but Harry had genius. Arthur was chivalrous and courteous and charming, but Harry had a smouldering passion in his heart which sometimes she had seen in his eyes, though they were shy of her. He was a poet and an artist. Arthur had a gentle, well-behaved homage for her. It was Harry who would be her real lover if she let him, if she dared to let him, if she had the courage of her own heart.

It was after dinner in the drawing-room that she was left alone with Arthur, deliberately, of course, by her mother, who pretended that she had some letters to write, while his lordship was downstairs in the study dismissing one of the footmen who had been impertinent.

"Well, Arthur," said Isobel, after he had made some polite remarks about the weather, "I know exactly what you want to say, so why not say it? You and Papa have arranged the matter. He is quite satisfied with your prospects. He has been very liberal regarding my allowance. He sees no reason why our wedding should be postponed any further. He is willing that our engagement should be published in *The Times* and the *Morning Post* the day after to-morrow. In spite of his abhorrence of your Liberal principles he is charmed to think of you as a son-in-law."

Arthur was surprised and puzzled.

"How did you know all that, my dear? I confess that is exactly how the matter stands."

"The matter!" exclaimed Isobel. "As though it were a business deal, or a political alliance! The 'matter' stands like that, as though my heart, all my future life and happiness, could be arranged, settled, signed and sealed in Papa's study over a glass of sherry."

Arthur Mannington raised his fair eyebrows with a look of astonishment.

"My dearest! Are you angry with me? Perhaps I used the wrong words. Nothing is arranged or settled without your consent. Of course I had to speak to your father about my affairs. He has to be satisfied that I am able to support you worthily. But that means nothing unless it means everything to you. Unless you love me it is less than nothing. Of my own love there is nothing more to say, unless you will let me say it again. I cannot think of life without you, my dear. I have the very deepest love for you. Your beauty and your virtue are beyond all words to me."

"Arthur," cried Isobel, "I wish you wouldn't talk about my virtue as though I were a saint. I am *not* a saint. I hate the idea of being a saint. I am seething with foolish passions and human frailties. I am bad-tempered. I am utterly deceitful. I have all the qualities of the Scarlet Woman. I am warning you——"

Arthur laughed at this outburst and tried to take her hand.

"My dearest, there is no such thing as Christian perfection.

I like to hear you blame yourself for the little peccadilloes that creep into every human heart. I should not love you so much if I thought you were already angelic, with a golden halo round your hair! I want a human wife. I want your womanly beauty in my arms. And I do not want to wait for it much longer. I am impatient for your love, my darling. Look, will not this tempt you to let me tell the world that a very great wedding will take place when the Season ends?"

He thrust two fingers into his white waistcoat and pulled out a ring. It was a ring of an old-fashioned workmanship, with five little pearls in a gold claw.

"Let me put it on your finger," he pleaded, going down on his right knee and taking her hand.

If once that little ring had been slipped on to the third finger of Isobel's left hand she would have been caught and captured, as she knew, so that she pulled her hand swiftly away and put it behind her back.

"No, Arthur," she cried, "I do not love you enough for that. I love you very much, but not enough for marriage. Not yet, please, please. I believe I love somebody else. I am almost sure that I am desperately in love with another friend. If I know my own heart——"

If the earth had suddenly cracked and opened beneath his feet Arthur Mannington could not have been more aghast and dismayed.

He rose from his kneeling position and turned very pale, and put his left hand to his heart as though he felt a wound there.

"Isobel! Oh, my dear! Do not tell me that!"

Suddenly she broke down and wept, and, going to him, held the lapel of his coat with its silk facings and laid her head on his shoulder, crying.

"I am so sorry, Arthur," she sobbed. "I am not quite sure. It is all very frightening."

It was Arthur who was frightened.

"Tell me," he said gently, although he had asked her not to tell: "who is this other man?"

"I have not the right to tell you," she sobbed. "He has said nothing to me. It is all my foolishness."

Arthur was thinking very deeply. He knew, or thought he knew, all Isobel's friends and the young men who came to her father's house. There was not one of them who leapt to his mind as a possible rival. Not for a moment did he think of

Harry Verney whom once he had brought to his mother's reception. That friendship Isobel had kept as secret as her visits to the theatre in hansom cabs.

When Lady Alderton returned to the drawing-room she was distressed to see that Isobel had been weeping and that Arthur was pale and disturbed. He made a pretext for leaving early, and kissed Isobel very tenderly when he said good night.

"Isobel," asked Lady Alderton when he had left the room, "what has happened, my dear? Why are your eyes so red? What have you said to Arthur?"

Isobel knelt down beside her on the Turkey carpet and put her arms about her.

"Oh, Mamma, I am extremely unhappy. But please do not ask me to explain. Love is very alarming when it comes into one's life."

His lordship's heavy footsteps sounded on the polished boards outside the drawing-room door, and Isobel sprang up and pretended to turn over some music at the piano.

"Well, Isobel," asked her father good-naturedly and even tenderly, "are you wearing that pretty ring which Arthur brought for you?"

"No, Papa. It did not fit me very well. He took it away again."

"Oh well, that is easily remedied."

She hadn't the courage to tell him then that perhaps the ring could never be made to fit. He stooped down and kissed her shoulder above her muslin frock.

"We must put a few lines in the public Press," said his lordship.

She knew then that she must tell.

"Papa," she said, with a sudden whiteness taking all the colour from her face, "I am not going to get engaged to Arthur yet. I am too young to know my own heart. I do not want to be hurried, Papa."

The good nature left his lordship's eyes and his tenderness evaporated.

"That is absurd, Isobel! You cannot shilly-shally with Arthur like that! It is all arranged. Your marriage will take place before the General Election. Your mother and I entirely agree with Arthur that this is desirable in view of his duties in the House when he becomes a Member."

Isobel stood up from the music-stool, dropping one of her songs. It was entitled "Scenes that are Brightest".

"Papa," she said in a low voice which quivered with her mingled emotions of rebellion and panic, "I do not agree that my marriage is desirable before the General Election. Arthur said nothing to me about that. Am I to have my life arranged to suit his political convenience? Am I to have it arranged by you and Mamma without any reference to my own feelings?"

Lady Alderton became very pale at this outburst in the presence of his lordship.

"Isobel, darling, restrain yourself, I beg of you! Remember the respect you owe to Papa. We have only been thinking of your happiness. We have taken for granted that you love dear Arthur. There has never been any question about that, surely?"

"I love Arthur as a friend," said Isobel. "A husband must have a different kind of love if marriage is to be happy."

His lordship made a curious noise in his throat and plucked at his whiskers nervously.

"God bless my soul! Isobel, I can't think where you have been getting these modern ideas, these morbid and immoral notions. Love is love. A wife's love for her husband is based on duty and respect."

"There is such a thing as passion, Papa," said Isobel.

Lord Alderton's face flushed with real embarrassment at the impropriety of his daughter's words, as it seemed to him. Lady Alderton was visibly dismayed and shocked.

"How dare you say such a thing?" asked his lordship. "What do you know about such subjects? Have any of the maids been talking wickedly to you? I always believed you were innocent and God-fearing."

"Papa," cried Isobel, "you forget that I am grown up. You even want me to get married in a few weeks. Surely I have a right to know what marriage means and to make sure of my own heart before I walk into such a lifelong trap!"

"Trap!" exclaimed Lord Alderton, gaping in a curious way, and not shutting his mouth again, as though this word had paralysed his facial muscles.

"Isobel!" said her mother. "Why do you speak of marriage like that? It ought to be the most beautiful relationship."

"Yes, Mamma. That is what it ought to be. But sometimes we poor women are made to suffer too much because we marry too hurriedly or to please our parents. I have just been reading a novel by Mr. George Meredith——"

"That is the cause of it," said her father sternly. "These novels are pestilential. They ought to be forbidden by Law."

They are undermining the old moralities. I was never allowed to read a novel until I went to the University, and then I had no time for such trash."

"Perhaps it would have been better if you had read more, Papa. Then you would have known more about human nature and the sensibilities of women."

She faced her father with her chin raised and a strange defiance in her eyes.

He glanced at her sharply, and then looked away.

"Isobel," he said sternly, "I do not wish to argue with you about irrelevant subjects. I wish to inform you that I shall insert a notice in *The Times* and the *Morning Post* announcing your engagement and approaching marriage with Arthur."

"I forbid you to, Papa."

Her words rang out so clearly and loudly that she was frightened by her own voice.

Lord Alderton's face turned ashen and the line of his mouth hardened. No one had ever used that word "forbid" to him since his nursery days. It was he who had said, "I forbid". That was his prerogative, as a nobleman, as a legislator, as a magistrate, and as a father. To hear it from the lips of his daughter was something outside his experience and philosophy. If she had attacked him with a carving-knife she could not have inflicted a worse wound to his pride and spirit.

Without a word he turned on his heel and walked heavily out of the room.

"Isobel," said Lady Alderton in a low voice of terror, "I think you must be mad. You have grievously hurt your dear father. He has *never* been spoken to like that before."

Isobel was still very pale, and her chin was still raised as when she had spoken to her father with that defiance in her eyes. But now she drooped her head and put her arms down upon the edge of the mantelshelf and her forehead upon her bare arms, while her pretty shoulders shook with grief.

"My dear! Oh, my dear!" cried poor Lady Alderton, putting her arm round Isobel's neck with sudden pity.

Perhaps if Isobel had been allowed to go to the Derby with Kate Verney and the others her answer to Arthur might have been different. All day she had had a sense of being suppressed and thwarted and denied all liberty. Arthur's visit had been most ill-timed, and his private conversation with her father had seemed to confirm her suspicions that she was being pushed into marriage without her own consent and before she knew the

secrets of her own heart. All that had acted mightily in favour of Harry Verney, who, in a barely furnished den up three flights of stairs in an office off Fleet Street, was writing a humorous account of Derby Day, which I have just read in the *Morning Chronicle* as it appeared sixty-three years ago. It is quite amusing.

XXXII

It was perhaps a week after the Derby—Harry's letters to Isobel are not always dated—when the descriptive reporter of the *Morning Chronicle* sat upstairs in his den reading the latest book of poems by Algernon Charles Swinburne. The lilt of the lines played a melody in his heart and brain, so that he was deaf to a barrel-organ in Royal Avenue grinding out a tune from *Traviata*, and to the hoarse shouts of a coster selling fresh mackerel—which wasn't as fresh as all that, judging from the smell which followed his barrow, and the miaulings of a cat following him with a stiff tail—and the five-finger exercises of the youngest O'Brien girl in the house opposite.

If love were what the rose is,
And I were like the leaf,
Our lives should grow together
In sad or singing weather,
Blown fields or flowerful closes,
Green pleasure or grey grief ;
If love were what the rose is,
And I were like the leaf.

If you were queen of pleasure,
And I were king of pain,
We'd hunt down love together,
Pluck out his flying feather,
And teach his feet a measure,
And find his mouth a rein ;
If you were queen of pleasure
And I were king of pain.

Harry Verney was in his old smoking-jacket of black velvet frogged with black braid, very grand when new, but now out at elbows and worn like a cat's fur with mange. His hair was disordered because of his habit of thrusting his fingers through it. His room was untidy because he objected to Alice dusting his papers and books, which lay scattered about the cane-bottomed chairs and the horsehair sofa with broken springs.

Over his mantelpiece was his helmet as a private in the Artists Corps, which he had joined in a patriotic mood, though lately he had been slack in turning up on parade or taking part in route marches, owing to his journalistic activities and social engagements, so that he had received a sharp note from his commanding officer, named Frederick Leighton, who happened to be an artist as well as a volunteer. His silver-grey uniform hung over the back of a chair, and a small kitten played with the end of his belt.

In the fireplace, stuffed with paper shavings during the summer months, were old proofs of his newspaper articles; and on the book-shelves, which he had put up and stained with his own hands, his library—collected since boyhood, with many old and tattered volumes—was as disorderly as new recruits on the parade ground before they had learnt to form fours. But there were times when this sanctuary was a shrine of beauty more splendid than the Sistine Chapel, and its faded wallpaper gleamed with a more golden light than the mosaics in St. Mark's, because of the dreams that came to him there, and his visions of life's loveliness.

If you were queen of pleasure,
And I were king of pain——

He raised his head and listened. Surely that was a knock at the front door? Damn it! Probably it was some tradesman coming to leave half a pound of butter, or a new pair of shoes for Kate. He would have to go down and open the door. He was alone in the house. His mother had taken the maid to the dentist after she had been howling with toothache caused by eating too many acid tablets. Kate was at a rehearsal. . . . No, he wouldn't go down and open the door. Let the fellow knock until he guessed the house was empty.

But it wasn't quite like a tradesman's knock when it sounded again. It was a quick little tattoo, too lively for an errand boy. Perhaps it was Kate, home earlier than she expected, and impatient on the doorstep.

Harry went down, annoyed by this interruption of Swinburne's new poems, opened the door, and saw Isobel standing there, looking more wonderful than he had ever seen her because of some light in her eyes or the worship in his.

"Oh, Harry," she said, "will it be dreadfully inconvenient

to your mother if I invite myself to tea? I do so want to see Kate again . . . and . . . and . . . to have a talk with you, of course!"

She was a little excited, as though this unannounced visit was a great adventure, and a little shy, so that her eyelashes fluttered as she smiled at him.

"Come in," said Harry.

It was only when he had shut the door after her and taken her into the little drawing-room that he told her there was nobody at home except himself. He explained about the dentist, and Kate's rehearsal.

Isobel looked somewhat alarmed for a moment, and disappointed.

"I am so sorry! I suppose I shall have to be going, then?"

"Why?" asked Harry. "Sit down, won't you, and take off that jacket. It's too warm in here, with the sun beating through the lace curtains."

He too was nervous of being alone with Isobel in his own house, not because of any apprehension, but because his absurd shyness was greater than hers.

Isobel laughed nervously and glanced at him under her fluttering lashes.

"Harry! Think of the proprieties! What would Mrs. Grundy say?"

"Oh, drat the old lady!" said Harry. "It's absurd to pay the slightest attention to that sort of nonsense."

He spoke with the utmost sincerity, although he was quite a stickler for propriety and a champion of Mother Grundy when his sister Kate was apt to claim liberties in that respect.

"Do you think I might stay five minutes without an outrage against the social code?" asked Isobel, only half in earnest, and yet apprehensive as the daughter of her father.

"It's quite likely my mother will be back before then," said Harry carelessly. "In any case I shall be vastly disappointed if you do not stay to tea."

"Is that just politeness?" asked Isobel teasingly. "Or is it the real truth as written in the *Morning Chronicle*, that most honest of newspapers?"

"It is strictly and absolutely true," said Harry very earnestly.

They stood as shyly as a small boy and girl introduced to each other at a party, unable to think of the next thing to say.

Somehow they were both overwhelmed with self-consciousness. It was not like meeting in the British Museum or Madame Tussaud's, with other people about them. But here, in the little house in Royal Avenue, they were really alone with each other for the first time.

"Do sit down," said Harry, suddenly remembering his manners and rushing to get a chair for her.

Gradually they recovered their composure and sense of ease, and talked about the books they had been reading—*The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* and those poems by Swinburne. Only once or twice did Harry have a horrid twinge at the thought of his untidiness, that shabby old coat, his disordered hair, his baggy trousers. He made an apology on the subject when he noticed that she was observant of these things.

"I'm looking an awful tramp! These are my working clothes, not fit for human society."

"Oh, Harry, I like to see you just as you work! That velvet jacket suits you wonderfully."

"It's out-at-elbows," he remarked, showing her the fact thereof.

"But that's how it should be! An author's jacket. Worn with writing wonderful words. I am so glad you are just a little shabby. I do not like well-dressed men like tailors' dummies. You look splendid, Harry!"

"Good heavens, no!"

He blushed like a schoolgirl at such words.

"Yes, really, I mean it. But I am afraid I have interrupted your writing. Oh dear, I did not think of that! I will go at once. How selfish of me to sit here chattering while you want to write an article or something!"

"I don't want to write anything," said Harry hurriedly. "I was just reading Swinburne. For heaven's sake don't go. My mother will be here in a few minutes."

Isobel sat down again on the horsehair sofa. She was tempted, she tells me, to say something about Arthur Mannington, but could not bring herself to do so. They talked utter trivialities, and yet underneath they were both aware of an emotional condition which gave their words deep meanings, tremendous significance.

The little ormolu clock on the mantelpiece ticked out time as fast as other clocks do, but they were unaware of this marking off of life's measure. Ten minutes . . . twenty minutes. It seemed to them no more than a few seconds.

Isobel was bold enough to say that she would like to see his den one day.

"Why not now?" asked Harry. "Not that there's anything to see except untidiness and squalor. Still, if it would amuse you——"

"It would *thrill* me!" said Isobel.

"It's a bit of a climb upstairs."

"I am a wonderful climber!"

Goodness knows what Mother Grundy would have said to these two young people in the year of grace 1868 if she had seen them going upstairs in that lonely little house to Harry's study. I am inclined to believe that Isobel was aware of venturing to the very edge of indiscretion. I cannot bring myself to believe that a Victorian young lady could have mounted three flights of stairs with a young man, in an otherwise uninhabited house, without a tremor of alarm at her own audacity and a sense of impropriety of the very gravest kind. If she did not have these secret thoughts, then there is no truth in the Victorian legend.

And here it is necessary and painful for me to add that Mother Grundy was justified in her watchfulness and her insistence upon elderly and ugly chaperons for the due safeguarding of ardent youth. In that writer's den at the top of a house in Royal Avenue, Chelsea, these two young people found themselves presently in a passionate embrace.

It happened quite suddenly, with extraordinary unexpectedness, like an electric spark flashing when two wires touch.

Isobel was enchanted with Harry's study. It was so exactly as she had imagined it. She loved the painted book-shelves, and the disorderly array of old and tattered volumes, so different from her father's library with its rows of magnificently bound books. She cried out with excited pleasure because so many of her own favourites were there—all the novels she loved best, by Thackeray and Dickens and George Eliot, *The Cloister and the Hearth*, *The Three Musketeers*, *Consuelo*, by George Sand, *Pride and Prejudice*, Lamb's *Essays*, Boswell's *Johnson*—so many more.

"Our minds have travelled along the same roads," she said. "It is nice to think, Harry, that you and I have steeped ourselves in the same thoughts and the same romance. Our minds have the same texture, as it were. Do you see what I mean?"

He saw perfectly what she meant.

"I wish——" he said, and then stopped and became rather pale.

"You wish what, Harry?" she asked, smiling at him and looking into his eyes.

He did not say what he wished. Something had happened to him because of her smiling eyes, from which he could not liberate his own.

"Isobel!" he cried in a curiously harsh voice.

"Harry!" she said, and held out her hands to him.

He took hold of her hands and drew her towards him, and then put his arm about her and kissed her with a sudden release of passion. She did not resist him. She lay in his arms, held tight to his breast. She shut her eyes, and there were tears upon their lashes.

Then presently he took his arms away from her and staggered back very white-faced.

"Isobel! I was mad! I ought not to have dared! Forgive me!"

"There is nothing to forgive," she told him. "I love you, Harry."

She came close to him and put her hands on his shoulders and her forehead drooped against his chest.

"Harry, kiss me again! I want to know that you love me!"

"I dare not love you," he said, and yet betrayed himself by his caress as he held her in his arms again. "I haven't the right to love you."

"Say that you love me, Harry!" she asked.

"I love you," he said. "I love the ground you walk on. But I am a cad to say so. I can never forgive myself. This ought never to have happened."

"I am glad it has happened," said Isobel. "It *had* to happen, Harry. God has made it happen."

Harry still held her tight, but raised his face and looked over her head at his barely furnished room and its untidiness.

"I am mad," he said again. "I ought to be horsewhipped. It was a sudden madness."

She put her hand up to his head and tried to draw it down, but he kept it raised.

"My dear and most beautiful one," he said in a broken voice, "don't let me kiss you again. Don't you see that I have no right? You belong to another world, into which I can never

come. You are a thousand miles above me and I am in the gutter."

"Oh, Harry! You have your genius. I look up to you. It is you who are a thousand miles above me. Kiss me again!"

"I am a reporter on five pounds a week, Isobel. Your father is one of the great men in England. Your family——"

"I am yours, Harry. I have nothing but my love to give you. Tell me you love me. Nothing else matters. Hold me tight in your arms, Harry."

He held her tight in his arms. He kissed her again. There was no Mother Grundy to cry out upon that boy and girl for shocking indiscretion, until suddenly a voice called out from the stairs below.

"Harry! Are you home, my dear? Harry!"

It was Mrs. Verney, who had come home with poor Alice after dreadful scenes in a dentist's room where two teeth had been drawn from a servant girl's jaw without any of those injections which reduce the agony of our post-Victorian sufferings to some extent.

"Good God!" whispered Harry, looking panic-stricken. "How shall I explain?"

It was Isobel Ingleby who did the best thing possible. She fled from Harry's arms and went to the door and spoke in a gay voice.

"Harry is just showing me his writing-den, Mrs. Verney. I am *terribly* thrilled. I have come to tea, uninvited."

Mrs. Verney was surprised and startled.

"Good gracious!" she cried. "Is that Lady Isobel?"

She came up with her bonnet unfastened and looked at them both with a whimsical smile in which there was a hint of apprehension.

"Hullo, you two conspirators! Why come up here when there is a perfectly good drawing-room? There is nothing to see in this untidy room."

"Oh yes, Mrs. Verney!" said Isobel. "Much to see. Dozens of old books which are Harry's favourites and mine. And the writing-pad on which a famous author jots down thoughts and dreams."

She was a wonderfully good actress. Her flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes may have suggested that she had found an unusual excitement in the sight of ill-bound books, but she played her part well without losing her nerve like Harry, who stood

looking embarrassed, guilty, and thoroughly ill at ease, as his mother noticed instantly.

"I am dying for a cup of tea," said Mrs. Verney. "Let's go downstairs and see if we can get some."

"I will help you!" cried Isobel. "I know where the sugar is kept. I will carry in the tray again."

"Not in that frock, child," said Mrs. Verney, pinching her arm.

Isobel stayed to tea and chatted very brightly with Mrs. Verney, and hardly looked at Harry except once when his mother left the room for a few moments to look after Alice with the swollen face. Then she jumped up and held his hands very tightly for just those moments before she fled back again to her chair.

"I am afraid I shall have to take a hansom back," she said presently. "Otherwise dear old Venny will begin to fret."

Harry fetched a hansom and helped her into it, and once again she held his hand tight before he gave her address to the man up aloft.

She whispered three words to him.

"I love you!"

He did not answer except by the message in his eyes.

Then he went back into the house and whistled "Three Blind Mice" as he came into the drawing-room.

"Any more tea?" he asked, trying to make his voice sound steady and natural.

"Only a weak cup," said his mother. Then she looked up at him and laughed.

"Harry, dear boy, wasn't it rather—well—dangerous—to take that pretty girl up to your den?"

"Good heavens, no!" said Harry. "She wanted to see it. How absurd you are, Mother."

She was silent for a moment or two while she poured out his third cup of tea.

"That's all right," she said. "I'm not fussy about that kind of thing. But if I were you I wouldn't see too much of Mistress Isobel. She's not our class, you know. She belongs to the Nobs. They let you down every time, Harry, I don't mind telling you. I happen to know."

"Oh, rubbish, Mother!" said Harry grumpily. "I don't know what you're talking about. The Nobs? Good God, I wish you wouldn't use words like that."

He drank his third cup of tea in three gulps, and then sloped up to his own room. And when he had shut the door of his own sanctuary he leaned up against the wall with his hands clasped and his head on his hands, racked by a strange sensation of ecstasy and agony.

XXXIII

RICHARD had his "almighty row" with his honoured father as anticipated when Red Slippers failed to win the Derby. His allowance of fifteen hundred a year had entirely failed to suffice for the innumerable expenses incurred by a young man with sporting instincts, an extensive wardrobe, a generous disposition, and elegant tastes. As he explained to his father on the day of reckoning hastened by the impatience and impertinence of his tailor in Cork Street, fifteen hundred a year was really a paltry sum as a yearly allowance for anyone of decent standing. It was, he said, almost impossible to live on such a pittance unless he went about looking like a tramp and avoiding his friends.

Before this interview Richard had been obliged to steady his nerves by a dose of brandy, but even that had failed to give him courage, and beads of perspiration broke out upon his forehead when he stood outside his father's study. He could hardly bring himself to turn the handle of the door, and retreated once in an ignominious panic which he tried to hide from one of the footmen in the hall by whistling the air of "Villikins and his Dinah" with assumed cheerfulness.

Years ago Isobel had accused him of being frightened of her Papa, and he had pinched her arm until she squealed. But it was quite true, and he had never overcome his awe and timidity in the presence of his exalted parent. There had never been any of that comradeship between father and son which is now customary and good. Their relationship was based on authority and fear. If ever Richard found himself in a mess, morally or socially, his father would be the last person to whom he would go with any hope of sympathy and understanding. He was utterly unaware that it was shyness as well as austerity in his father's character which made a barrier between them, and that Lord Alderton's belief in discipline and severity did not prevent his admiration and affection for his handsome son. How could he know this when never, as far as he could remember,

had he heard one comradely, sympathetic, or genial word from this autocrat of family life? Now that he was summoned to his father's presence to explain various outstanding debts Richard faced the ordeal as though going before a judge on a charge of high treason.

"Sit down," said his lordship as Richard entered at last with a desperate effort to look easy and unconcerned.

His father was examining the tailor's bill, which had been sent to him direct, and he put his finger on one item.

"I see three overcoats down here, Richard. Why three, may I ask?"

Richard supplied the answer readily.

"The English climate is very variable, sir. Also I do not wear the same clothes in the country as I do in Town. I am sure you do not want me to make myself ridiculous among my friends—and so forth."

Lord Alderton glanced at him over his tortoiseshell glasses, and the eyes of father and son met for a moment and then avoided each other.

"I want you to make yourself an honest man, Richard."

Richard flushed angrily. This was going too far even for his father.

"Are you accusing me of being dishonest, sir?"

Lord Alderton tapped with his finger-nails on the mahogany desk at which he sat in a straight-backed chair.

"I am accusing you of being a feather-headed and irresponsible young man. I do not call you deliberately dishonest, but I do call you carelessly dishonest in ordering things on credit for which you have no prospect of paying on the very handsome allowance I make you. Also I object very strongly to your gambling away considerable sums of money—considerable, I have no doubt—which will have to come out of *my* pocket. How much, for instance, did you lose on the Derby?"

Richard shifted uneasily in his chair. He had no idea that his father knew anything about his bets or about the unfortunate "bump" he had taken at the Derby.

"Has anybody been telling tales about me, sir?" he asked with a touch of irony and indignation.

Lord Alderton smiled grimly and sank deeper into his chair, with his chin in his dog's-eared collar.

"I am not completely ignorant of the way in which you waste your money and time, Richard, or rather I should say, *my* money and *your* time. As it happens, an old acquaintance of mine was

on a coach next to yours on Epsom Downs—I have not yet been informed how much you paid for the hire of that coach!—and mentioned the fact to me at the Club, no doubt with secret pleasure that a man of my principles should have a son with his own sporting proclivities. If I understood him rightly, you consumed a considerable quantity of champagne in the company of some ladies not of your own social status, as far as he could judge from their behaviour.”

Richard jumped up from his chair and spoke heatedly. Perhaps the brandy he had taken to give himself a touch of Dutch courage was beginning to work in his brain.

“I regret, sir, that you listen to scandalous stories about your own son from old gentlemen who ought to have their noses pulled for outrageous impertinence.”

“Sit down,” said Lord Alderton sternly. “Do not address me like that, Richard, or I shall be less indulgent regarding these bills than I had the intention of being.”

Richard remained silent while his father went through the papers, studying them item by item, until presently he pushed them away and delivered judgment.

“Disgraceful and prodigal extravagance, Richard. That is bad enough, but what angers me, what bewilders me, is the utter lack of influence which your education and your home life have had upon your moral character. That, I confess, is a mystery to me! All your life you have been brought up to fear God and avoid abomination. In our morning prayers I have constantly besought the Almighty to deliver my family from the temptations which beset this modern world, and especially the evils of intemperance and frivolity. I have endeavoured to set you an example of austerity and duty. I have upheld the ideals of an Evangelical life befitting our social position and responsibilities. Not one of these ideals seems to have taken root in your soul. You seem to have no ambition to serve your country or your God. . . . I will pay the bills for the sake of my own honour, but I warn you, Richard, that unless I see you develop more serious intentions and follow a more moral way of life, I shall take severe steps to restrain your profligacy.”

Richard shrugged his shoulders impatiently. He had winced under his father's words like a young colt who feels the whip. He was tempted to lash out in rage and derision. His father had talked about him as though he had been wallowing in immorality, whereas he had been—he thought—almost ridiculously virtuous. Bitterness surged up in him. But for the discipline of a life-

time in the presence of his father, he would have said harsh and perhaps unforgivable things. Then his courage oozed out and he became very pale.

"I am obliged to you, sir," he said stiffly. "I regret that you have apprehensions regarding my moral character. Perhaps you will allow me to say in self-defence that they are utterly unfounded and—and—most damnably unjust."

"We will not continue this conversation," said his lordship.

"Very well, sir."

Richard, Viscount Ingleby, pushed back the lock of hair over his forehead, tightened his lips, and left the room. Outside the door he wiped away the perspiration which again moistened his forehead. He felt that he had been beaten with rods.

XXXIV

It was unfortunate for Isobel that Richard should have had his "row" with his father on the day that she paid her surprise visit to Harry Verney. It was even more unfortunate for her and others that his lordship should have walked through Belgrave Square to Sloane Street and thence to Sloane Square in order to take the air at the very time—namely an hour before dinner—that Isobel was driving home in a hansom cab from Royal Avenue, Chelsea.

Lord Alderton was thinking of the scene he had had with Richard in the morning. No doubt his son's words rankled, and perhaps he was still trying to understand why his example and precepts should have had such slight effect upon Richard's character. A newspaper urchin shouted out "Evenin' Speshul!" and he stopped on the kerbstone to buy the *Pall Mall Gazette*, which announced an article on the election prospects. If he had not halted at this very moment and place, he would not have seen something which caused him to open his mouth slightly with an air of stupefied surprise. What he saw was his daughter looking over the apron of the cab with a flushed face and shining eyes. She did not see her father standing there on the kerbstone, nor did her driver pay the slightest attention to a distinguished-looking gentleman in a top hat who raised his umbrella and called out "Stop!"

Lord Alderton was not only surprised. He was dismayed. It seemed to him incredible that his daughter, whom he believed to be innocent and virtuous, should be driving unattended in a public vehicle which was only used by lonely ladies if they were careless of their reputation or beyond the need of care. But he could not disbelieve the evidence of his eyes, and for a few moments he stood as though rooted to the pavement in Sloane Square, with his lips still slightly parted, before moving away and going back to his house at his usual pace and with his usual dignity. But he was assailed by very serious doubts, as afterwards appeared. Not more than a week ago a lady whom he

happened to meet with Lady Alderton at the Russells' had turned to him and said that she had seen Isobel at the Haymarket Theatre with some young friends.

"You are mistaken," said his lordship calmly. "My daughter does not go to the playhouse. It is against my principles."

"How very strange!" cried Lady Malmesbury. "My eyes must have deceived me. But I could have sworn it was your beautiful Isobel."

Now, after this strange vision of her in a hansom cab, his lordship remembered that conversation and was very gravely perturbed. As soon as he reached home he entered his study and pulled the bell cord.

"Kindly ask Miss Venables to come downstairs. I wish to speak to her," he said to the footman.

"Yes, my lord. May I remind your lordship that Miss Venables still has the mumps and is confined to her own room?"

"Ask her to be good enough to come down."

Outside the door the footman winked his left eye at an imaginary friend and went upstairs to deliver his message.

Miss Venables had her face wrapped in red flannel and was inhaling Friar's Balsam, so that she was not presentable at the moment. She was even less presentable when, with great agitation, after receiving this summons, she divested her face of the red flannel, revealing the swollen glands which made her so remarkably like an unkind caricature of Queen Victoria.

"Whatever can his lordship want, Robert?" she asked in a whisper at the door.

"Nothing pleasant, Miss, I should imagine. He seems in a 'wax', if I may say so."

"Oh dear!" said Miss Venables faintly.

There were things on her conscience which made a coward of her. Her habitual fear of his lordship was increased tenfold by this secret uneasiness.

"Did you wish to see me, my lord?" she asked, trying to control the flutter of her heart when she presented herself in the study.

His lordship was standing on his hearthrug with his back to the fireplace. There was a look of sombre determination on his face, as though he were ready for a stern and painful duty. Miss Venables was terrified at the grimness of this expression, and she was not relieved by the calmness of his introductory words.

"I suppose Lady Isobel is dressing for dinner?"

Miss Venables agreed that that was so. She knew because the maid had been sitting with her until Lady Isobel rang her bell.

His lordship crossed the room to shut the door, and then returned to his place on the hearthrug.

"Miss Venables," he said, "you have been in my household for a number of years, and I have always had great confidence in your loyalty and integrity."

"Thank you!" said Miss Venables, growing pale because of some twinge of conscience. "Thank you, my lord!"

"It is for that reason," said his lordship, "that I wish to speak to you in confidence with regard to my daughter, in order to be in full possession of the facts before speaking to her directly. It is possible that I may be under a misapprehension. It is, I hope, likely that there is a very good explanation of something which, until that explanation is given, fills me with grave concern."

He paused for a time which seemed appalling to Miss Venables, and then cleared his throat huskily a moment, as though hardly able to bring himself to say the words which followed.

"I saw my daughter to-day—alone—without a chaperon—in a hansom cab, coming from the direction of a low part of London. That is to say, Chelsea."

Miss Venables became very pale and was quite sure that she was on the verge of a heart-attack. As she was not called upon to make a reply, she remained silent and looked down at the Turkey carpet as though she saw something ghastly there.

"Do you happen to know," asked his lordship, "whether there was any good reason—some urgent case of charity—or sudden illness with which my daughter may be stricken—why she should drive alone through the streets of London in a hansom cab?"

Miss Venables moistened her lips with the point of her tongue. Her swollen glands became more inflamed.

"I am not aware of anything of that nature," she answered in a timid voice which quavered uneasily.

"She is not unwell?"

"Oh, I hope not. She has not said anything to me."

His lordship thought deeply, and then turned his steely eyes upon Miss Venables.

"Do you know of any other occasion upon which my daughter has gone out alone in a public vehicle?"

Miss Venables knew of other occasions, as we have seen.

She had done her best to prevent them. She had implored her darling young lady not to engage in such dangerous adventures. She had wept about them. But now, with those steely eyes fixed upon hers, she found it difficult to give an answer. She was torn between her love for Isobel and her sense of truthfulness and honour. The conflict was agonizing, and she would rather that the earth had swallowed her up. Never in her whole life had she told the least untruth. It was especially painful that she should have to lie to his lordship, for whom she had a respect amounting to veneration.

"Pardon me, my lord," she said feebly, "but I am feeling extremely unwell to-night."

His lordship made a little gesture with his right hand.

"I regret that. But kindly answer my question. Has my daughter been in the habit of driving about alone or visiting friends unchaperoned?"

"Oh, not a *habit*!" cried Miss Venables. "I can truthfully answer that she has not been in the habit of doing such a thing, my lord."

"More than once? Occasionally? Now and then? Answer me!"

He spoke with all the severity of a judge examining a prisoner from the Bench, and Miss Venables felt like the criminal in the dock.

"Perhaps *once* or even *twice*," she admitted, as though indeed she were not only a criminal but were being subjected to inquiry by *peine forte et dure*, on the rack of torture.

"I see," said his lordship.

He was silent for another few moments.

Then he asked another and even more terrible question.

"Has my daughter, to your knowledge, ever visited the play-house, alone or with friends?"

Miss Venables became livid with terror. She knew that Isobel had been to the theatre several times with the Verneys. She remembered the painful scene when Isobel had first revealed this dreadful intention. What could she say? She dared not lie to his lordship, and yet she dared not betray the secret of her darling young lady.

"Answer me," said Lord Alderton sternly and harshly.

Miss Venables burst into tears.

"Forgive me!" she cried. "I cannot answer that question, my lord!"

"If you do not answer in the negative," said Lord Alderton

with dreadful calmness, "I shall have to conclude that you know my daughter has visited the playhouse. Is that so, or is it not so?"

Miss Venables was sobbing painfully. Her swollen glands and this terror had twisted her mouth a little, so that she was in a pitiful condition.

"I think Lady Isobel was taken by some friends to see a performance of *Caste*," she confessed at last, utterly broken by Lord Alderton's cross-examination. "It is a most respectable and virtuous play, my lord."

"We are getting at the truth," he said grimly. "Will you kindly inform me, Miss Venables, what friends accompanied my daughter?"

This poor lady, who had been in his lordship's service for fifteen years on thirty shillings a week, was put to a form of torture which now goes by the name of the Third Degree. Under the repetition of his questions, and terrified by the severity of his voice, the steely glitter of his eyes, and the awfulness of his presence, she broke down utterly and confessed the facts.

Lady Isobel had been very friendly with a Middle Class family in Royal Avenue, Chelsea. The mother had been an actress, and the daughter was now acting at the Haymarket. There was a young man, Mr. Harry Verney, who wrote for the Press. Lady Isobel had been attracted to him by his intelligence and charm of manner. They had met at the dancing classes of Mrs. and the Misses Bland. And afterwards? Yes, in such educational institutions as the British Museum and Madame Tussaud's. Miss Venables had accompanied Isobel as her chaperon. Well, not, perhaps, always, but nearly always.

His lordship was satisfied with the information extorted from this unfortunate creature. He knew all that he desired to know, and too much.

He stood very silent for at least a minute, while Miss Venables sobbed bitterly with her handkerchief to her eyes.

Then he glanced at her coldly and declared the interview at an end.

"You may go. You are dismissed from my service. You have been unfaithful to your trust, disloyal to me, and unworthy of our confidence in you. You will pack your bags to-morrow, and I will give orders to have them conveyed to any address you may leave with the butler. I have nothing more to say."

Miss Venables fell upon her knees and begged for mercy. She had devoted her life to his service without any thought of

self. She could swear to the innocence and virtue of Lady Isobel, who had only been a little rash and romantic.

"Get up!" said his lordship harshly. "Leave this room instantly."

Poor Miss Venables fell into hysterics, and his lordship rang the bell so violently that two footmen came rushing into the room.

"Take that woman away," said his lordship.

They carried her away screaming, and the next act in the painful drama was when Lord Alderton sent for the butler and told him that dinner would be put back half an hour. Never before had such an order been given, and the amazing news of it spread among all the servants, who were stupefied and believed that something very dreadful must have happened, such as the death of Queen Victoria or, perhaps, that of Mr. Disraeli. It was the junior footman who suggested the fantastic rumour that young Lord Richard had forged his father's name to a cheque for ten thousand pounds.

XXXV

HIS lordship mounted to the drawing-room with a heavy tread. Lady Alderton was there in her evening gown of green silk, putting a few stitches into a woolwork screen while waiting for the dinner-gong and Isobel's appearance from her dressing-room. She was utterly unaware of the scene downstairs, ending in the dismissal of Miss Venables.

"Well, dear," she said, as his lordship entered, "have you had a pleasant day?"

"I have had a very unpleasant day," said his lordship in a voice which made his wife look up in sudden alarm.

He went across to her and put his hand on her shoulder.

"Alison," he said, "we are not blessed in our children. Richard is going to the dogs, and Isobel has been deceiving us in a most disgraceful way. I have grave doubts of her virtue."

Lady Alderton dropped her woolwork into her lap and cried out sharply.

"Robert! . . . How can you think such dreadful things?"

Lord Alderton groaned and paced up to the mantelpiece, where he tinkled one of the lustres as though to hide his deep emotion.

"They are forced on me," he said in a broken voice. "I feel that the foundations of my faith in my own family have slipped. I do not know whom I can trust."

"Robert!" cried Lady Alderton again. "Are you unwell? For mercy's sake tell me what has happened."

His lordship pulled out a bandanna handkerchief from a pocket in the tail of his coat and blew his nose violently before recovering his self-control.

"I have found out that Isobel has been going about alone in public vehicles. I have discovered that she has been going to the playhouse with actresses and undesirable people. I learn from Miss Venables—whom I have dismissed this evening—that Isobel has been carrying on a liaison with a low-class fellow—a journalist—whom she has met secretly many times in public

places, sometimes with Miss Venables and sometimes alone. Whether she has met him privately and in secret where the worst may have happened, I do not yet know. God forbid that it is so !”

Lady Alderton’s hands trembled in her lap and then fluttered up to her breast.

“Robert,” she said in a low voice, “do not think of such a thing. Do not suggest such a thing. Isobel is innocence itself.”

Lord Alderton turned on his wife sharply.

“She is not innocent. Even if she has not yet committed an unpardonable sin, she has deceived and disobeyed me. She has been acting a lie. She has been frequenting low society, without a word to us of her secret life.”

Lady Alderton rose from her chair and went towards her husband and put her hand on his shoulder.

“Robert, I beg of you to be more explicit. How do you know these things? Who are these people about whom you are talking? Who is this young man with whom you accuse Isobel of carrying on a liaison?”

“I have told you. He is a low journalist. A fellow who writes for the public Press.”

Lady Alderton turned pale. She thought back to the afternoon when she had called with her daughter at the little house in Royal Avenue, Chelsea. Isobel had been attracted by the young man there. Mr. Harry Verney. She had met him again in the House of Commons one evening.

“I think I know whom you mean,” she murmured. “There is a young man named Verney. I called on his mother one day.”

“You called on them?” asked his lordship incredulously. “An actress? The mother of an actress? Alison, it is unbelievable. Have you taken leave of your senses?”

Then, after all, he had not been wrong in saying that his faith in his own family was undermined, so that there was no solid ground of faith beneath him. His whole philosophy of life was threatened, if not wrecked. Of what use was his authority or his example? When he had believed himself feared and obeyed, he had been flouted and deceived.

“The young man is a friend of Arthur’s,” explained Lady Alderton. “It was Arthur who asked me to be kind to him. Isobel was interested in his literary work and they met at their dancing class. I am sure that Mr. Verney is a most respectable young man. But I had no idea that Isobel was meeting him. I swear to you that I had not the faintest idea of that.”

Lord Alderton was willing to believe her assurance, but he disagreed with her utterly that the young man could be respectable.

"He is a journalist, Alison. He writes for the newspapers. He frequents 'Grub Street', as they call it. If any journalist dares to call on me I tell the footman to fling him out and keep a watch on the umbrellas. These fellows are scavengers of social garbage or the paid agents of low-class politicians."

"Mr. Verney seems charming," said Lady Alderton. "But of course he is not the sort of young man Isobel ought to meet."

"Good God, no!" exclaimed his lordship in stronger language than he habitually used.

Then suddenly he was silent, as he heard the rustle of a silk dress on the polished boards. It was Isobel, dressed for dinner and ten minutes late for the usual time of that meal. She had no knowledge that the dinner-hour had been postponed. She was in complete ignorance of the emotional scenes which had happened while her maid was dressing her hair, wondering why her young mistress looked so radiantly beautiful to-night, and why she kept blushing at some secret and enchanting thoughts which put a kind of softness in her eyes not to be accounted for by the candlelight.

"Do not talk to me to-night, Rosamund. I want to think," she said.

The maid laughed as she brushed the young lady's hair.

"A penny for your thoughts, my lady," she said mischievously.

"Oh, they are beyond price!" answered Isobel.

I happen to know what thoughts were running through her head as she sat in front of the oval mirror having her hair dressed. She had already scribbled them to Harry after coming home, and I have read her letter—a charming, emotional letter, from which I dare to quote a few sentences, having her permission.

I feel deliriously happy, dear Harry, at the thought of those moments when you held me in your arms. . . . Whatever happens in future, nothing can rob me of that precious memory when love came to us with its divine revelation, breaking down all barriers between your heart and mine, my dear. . . . I feel awakened, like the sleeping Princess when she felt the kiss upon her cheek. Until now I have been asleep, or at least only half awake to the beauty of life. I have been imprisoned in timidities and conventions and family prohibitions. Your love has liberated me, dear Harry. . . . I feel that I have the courage to tell my father

and mother that I have found my lover, although now that I have written those words I feel a coward at the thought of doing so! My father will be very angry with me for meeting you without his knowledge. He will think I have been guilty of the gravest impropriety, when, as you know, my dearest Harry, our meetings have been as innocent as when the Babes in the Wood went hand in hand. . . .

It is a dreadful handicap to be the daughter of an Evangelical peer! If only I had been born in a little house in Royal Avenue, Chelsea! But to-night I will not think of my fears and difficulties. I will think only of my joy and pride in being loved by the most distinguished young man in London—or in life—who one day will be recognized for his genius by all the world! That is a prophecy, my dear lover, my "David Copperfield", my dear, dear Harry. . . .

It was with such thoughts as those in her mind, and shining in the new softness of her eyes, that she came into the drawing-room before dinner, ten minutes late.

"Is not dinner ready?" she asked.

She was aware instantly of something menacing in the silence of her father and mother, in the look on her father's face, in her mother's pallor. Something dreadful had happened. For a moment she wondered with a sudden fear in her heart whether Richard had been killed in some fearful accident.

"Isobel," said her father, "where have you been this afternoon?"

She was tempted to lie to him, to concoct some story about a visit to one of her aunts, and honesty compels me to state, on her own confession, that she would have lied if she had not become aware by some curious intuition that her father had asked this question because he knew and was setting a trap for her. By some means he knew. She was certain of it.

"I called on some friends of mine," she told him, trying to hide her fear.

"What friends?"

"The Verneys, Papa. They live in Chelsea."

"How did you get there and back again?"

"I drove in a hansom cab."

"Alone?"

"Oh yes, Papa. Miss Venables has the mumps, you know."

His lordship stared at her with brooding eyes. He was perhaps surprised at her truthfulness. He may even have been glad of it. If she had lied he would have turned her out of the house, and out of his heart.

She could hear his breathing. It made his shirt-front creak a little like Mr. Tennyson's when he told a young lady that her stays creaked, and then apologized for the mistake. He seemed to be suppressing a pent-up wrath, but it was at least a blessing that he suppressed it, so far.

"Isobel," he said, "I do not want to cross-examine you. I think it fair to tell you that Miss Venables has confessed, under pressure, to everything which you have kept secret from us. You have visited the playhouse in spite of my command to the contrary. You have gone about alone in public vehicles like a wanton woman. You have had secret meetings with a young man of low social position and disreputable profession. What explanation have you to give of this disobedience, this lack of self-respect, and this—this—abominable and disgraceful behaviour?"

Isobel lost the colour in her cheeks, and her eyelashes fluttered as they always did when she was nervous. She knew that the crisis of her life had come. She saw her mother sitting on the sofa looking very frightened and yet pitiful. And then she looked straight into her father's eyes and braved them.

"Papa," she said, "I do not wish to defend myself, because I think you would misunderstand everything I might say in self-defence. You have always been so severe with me—and with Richard. Other people of our age have much more liberty. Your prejudice against the theatre—it is proved because you call it 'the playhouse'—is quite old-fashioned and unnecessary. All my friends—in our own social position, I mean—go constantly. I felt I had to escape a little from the narrowness of our home life. I am sorry you think I deceived you, Papa."

His lordship suddenly lost his temper, which until then he had controlled. Isobel's words seemed to anger him intensely.

"Have you no shame?" he asked in a harsh voice. "You have been behaving like a harlot, and then you say you are sorry I think you deceived me."

Lady Alderton cried out to him.

"Robert! My dear! For mercy's sake!"

Lord Alderton breathed more heavily, and his face was deeply flushed.

"I must speak in plain words for plain facts," he said. "Until this afternoon I regarded Isobel as an innocent girl. I can no longer think so. She has been going about unchaperoned, 'escaping', as she says, from the 'narrowness' of this house in which she has been cherished and guarded from life's evil. She

has rebelled, not only against our authority as her parents, but against our love, our teaching, our prayers, our example of virtue. She has acted a lie day by day under our roof, awaiting her opportunity to sneak out of the house like a kitchen-maid going after a butcher's boy."

"Papa!" cried Isobel. "How *dare* you say such cruel things?"

She had tears in her eyes now, but her face flamed with indignation and anger.

"I am talking to you plainly," said her father, "and I wish for plain answers. What are your relations with this young man whom you have been meeting secretly?"

Isobel was silent for a moment. Her head drooped and she clasped her hands below her waist. Then she raised her head and looked into her father's eyes.

"I love him," she said very quietly. "It is a very pure and holy love, Papa, on his side and mine."

It was her mother who broke the silence which followed.

"Oh, my dear!" she cried. "This is terrible!"

Lord Alderton turned away suddenly and paced over to the window and stood for a few moments with his back to his wife and daughter. When he turned again he looked older and stricken. There were darker lines under his eyes, and when he spoke again his voice was harsh and cold.

"I can only regard you as being temporarily insane, Isobel. Is it any use reminding you that you are engaged in marriage to Arthur Mannington, and that if you have any sense of honour you will fulfil the pledge you have given to him?"

"I am afraid not, Papa," said Isobel. "I have never been formally engaged to Arthur. I shall write to him to-night and ask him to release me from *any* understanding of that kind."

Lord Alderton took hold of her bare arm and held it in such a tight grip that it hurt her so that she cried out.

"I forbid you to do so," he said harshly. "Arthur is one of the noblest young men in England. He is devoted to you."

"You are hurting my arm, Papa!" cried Isobel.

He released her arm with the marks of his finger-tips red on her skin, and suddenly his hardness and anger disappeared and he became pleading, like a frightened man.

"Isobel, I implore you to behave sensibly. I am willing to forgive your abominable behaviour if you will promise me never to see the young man for whom you have this romantic and foolish attachment, which I am willing to believe is an innocent one. He is a penniless writer for the public Press. He may

be pleasing and attractive. But you must realize that you belong to a station in life which demands duties from you in return for its privileges. I cannot believe that you could contemplate dishonouring our great name and dragging it down to disgrace and contempt. You have been thoughtless because of your youth, but I cannot bring myself to think, even now, that you are devoid of all sense of duty and affection which you owe to your mother and myself. Also you owe a loyalty to Arthur which you cannot disregard without a lack of sensibility and honour. Let me assure you that I am thinking only of your happiness, even when my conscience bids me reprove you for conduct which has alarmed and shocked me."

He came up to her and took her arms—one of which still bore the marks of his finger-tips—and kissed her on the forehead. Perhaps if he had continued to be harsh and angry Isobel would have maintained her pride and resistance, but when suddenly this austere man turned to tenderness, because of a fear that his anger would lead her into more stubborn revolt, she put her forehead down upon his chest and began to weep.

"I can never marry Arthur," she sobbed. "I love Harry, Papa!"

Lady Alderton put her arms round her daughter and tried to hush down this painful outburst of tears.

"My dear! My dear!"

His lordship relinquished his daughter into her mother's arms and went across the room with a heavy tread.

"Dinner is served, my lord," said the butler, appearing at the drawing-room door.

XXXVI

HARRY could hardly forgive himself for having given way to that passionate impulse which brought Isobel into his arms in the room upstairs. The memory of those moments was, of course, exquisite, and his untidy, dusty, and barely furnished study became hallowed by them so that never afterwards could he be there alone without the vision of Isobel's loveliness.

Her fragrance seemed to cling to the grubby curtains, and to linger between these four walls papered with a pattern of roses and trellis work. The things she had touched—his tattered old books like *The Cloister and the Hearth* and *The Three Musketeers* bore the imprint of her finger-tips, not visibly but with a spiritual touch which he felt when he put his lips to them. He was a Victorian and a romantic. Young men to-day may jeer at him for preposterous sentiment, for idealizing this girl beyond common sense, for working himself up into an emotional state not justified to those who have read their Freud and Jung.

Could they see him pacing round that room on the top floor of the little house in Royal Avenue, Chelsea—I have been round to-day to look up at its window—they would laugh at this whiskered young man in the frightful clothes of his period, who sighed and groaned because of love's agony, and flung himself into a cane-bottomed chair with his head bent forward and his hands between his knees, in an attitude of dejection and despair, because he loved a girl outside his social sphere, and—as he wrote to her—tried to ease his painful emotion and to express his ecstasy by writing incredibly bad verses which afterwards he posted to her in the pillar-box at the corner of King's Road. Why on earth, the modern young man might say, didn't he go to a cocktail party and pull himself together by a dry Martini and a look at half a dozen other girls who were probably more attractive than the high-born Isobel? Or, if the equivalent of cocktail parties did not exist at that time,

why didn't he pick up one of the young women in Ranelagh Gardens and restore himself to a sense of humour?

No, that is too cynical. In spite of Mr. Freud, romance is not dead, and young love, even in 1931, is still without self-consciousness. But its manifestations are different, and I must admit that Harry Verney did perhaps indulge in an excess of sentimentality belonging to the tradition of his time.

He worried his mother—not easily worried—by walking about London streets for half the night, when he needed a good sleep for his journalistic work. He fell into dark moods of melancholy, when his front lock of hair was apt to fall over his forehead and when he became taciturn and introspective. He lost his appetite and even refused second helpings of plum duff, for which previously he had had a great liking, thereby disappointing the little drudge below stairs who worshipped him from afar.

He became so absent-minded at times that he went out one day wearing odd socks, and on another occasion posted a letter to Isobel without an envelope, so that he had to bribe the postman heavily to recover this passionate epistle, open for all the world to read. He was irritable with his mother at the breakfast-table when she rebuked him for having walked about for an hour before going to bed, regardless of a creaking board and her own night's rest. He was impatient with Kate and offhand with Alice Calthrop when she came to tea. He startled the compositors of the *Morning Chronicle* by inserting some incoherent lines of verse—they had come up from his subconscious mind—into an article on street lighting in Islington. He was indeed in a very desperate state of mind.

I do not jeer at him. I have read his letters to Isobel Ingleby—some of them are by my side now—as he dashed them off page after page late at night in the *Chronicle* office after a day's work, or in his den. They reveal a charming mind, boyish and chivalrous and delicate. He acknowledged his love, he asserted it, with endless repetition of adoration, but always he reminded her that there were barriers between them which could never be broken down. He rebuked himself over and over again for having "dared" to love her. He was, he said, only a Grub Street hack earning a few pounds a week. He had no prospect of more fortunate conditions, at least for many years. It was impossible for this love of theirs to have any happy ending.

He asked her to put him out of her mind and heart, or only

to remember him as someone who had once touched her life a little and then gone his way. He would always be devoted and grateful for her friendship, and for a few moments of glory when he had held her in his arms and forgotten the social code of life and all reality. That reality existed and could not be ignored. She belonged to her father's people. She was the daughter of one of the great families of England. She was the heiress of a great house. She could never escape from that into poverty and squalor. He would be a cad and a blackguard if he allowed himself to dream for a moment that he could ask her to step down to his own condition of shabby gentility, and hardly even that—shabbiness without gentility.

The daughter of the Earl of Alderton could not live in a bed-sitting-room somewhere in Ebury Street or the Pimlico Road, which would have to be his way of life if he left his mother's house. It was a grotesque idea when he thought of the big house in Belgrave Square with its footmen and servants. He would be a criminal if he were ever tempted to think that she would be happy as the wife of a journalist who could not afford to give her even *one* of those frocks which had excited the neighbourhood when she visited Royal Avenue, Chelsea. He could not blame her father for telling her that he would never receive a journalist into his house and that if she ran off with him it would be as a lifelong exile from her family and former state.

Your father (wrote Harry) swears that he will cut off your allowance if you marry without his consent. Yes, I agree that that is tyranny and intolerance. But, my dear and beautiful Isobel, supposing he agreed to receive me into his house? Supposing he were to acknowledge me as an eligible young man for a son-in-law? How humiliated I should be as a subsidized man! How you would despise me if I submitted to such a shameful position. How I should be snubbed by all your family and friends as an intruder and outsider in the mystic circle of English nobility. I might not mind, because love makes up for everything, and I would humiliate myself to the dust if I might kiss the hem of your frock. But you would mind! It would hurt you to see me snubbed. . . .

No, our love must be spiritual. I must keep my distance. I dare not indulge in dreams. . . . And yet, not daring, I dream! Oh my dearest and fairest, I dream of you all day long! When I shut my door upstairs, at home, I see you in the room with me as

you stood once, so beautiful that I could hardly bear it, and had to reveal my worship and desire. You are my dream lady who walks before me in slum streets, and down by the river at night, and stands between me and some scene of London life where I go as a reporter. Yesterday I saw you so clearly on the doorstep of our little house when I came home late that I believed you were there in the flesh. You smiled at me and I felt my heart beat. It was an illusion, and yet a reality. I am sure you were there—your spirit—waiting for me! Our love is like that—an illusion and a reality. I see you, but I dare not touch you. You wait for me, but you are not there in the flesh. We love each other, but there is a world between us.

It would be unfair to quote more of his letters, or at least the emotional parts of them. There is a certain reticence due to any human mind revealing its secrets of first love, and yet in a way they are historical documents which take us back in this post-war world to the time and mind of our fathers—or grandfathers—when romantic love was expressed with more simplicity and with less self-consciousness than nowadays.

Harry Verney used poetical images to describe his adoration from which we should shrink because of our sense of humour and our disbelief in such ways of expression. He was more conscious of caste than is possible now, when the daughters of duchesses keep shops and when the sons of peers are trained as shopwalkers or salesmen. It was not an "inferiority complex"—as we should call it in our jargon of psychology—which made him stress the social difference between them. It was a recognition of actual fact which still existed at that time, although it is hard to believe that it was so dominant in English life no more than half a century ago.

In this year of grace the old county families are selling their houses and estates under the pressure of income tax. The pictures are being stripped off their walls by American collectors. A peer of the realm no longer counts as much as a trade union leader in political influence. Society has gone, in any exclusive sense. The dukes and earls and their good ladies are glad to get a meal from the *nouveaux riches*, who feed them off gold plate. In Harry's time a man like the Earl of Alderton would rather have seen his son dead—I do not exaggerate—than gone into "trade". Now the "tradesmen" are the only people who can afford to entertain on any lavish scale. In Harry's time the

"nobility and gentry" regarded themselves as of different human clay from the social grades beneath them.

Occasionally, as we have seen, some of the more liberal-minded invited literary lions or distinguished painters to their receptions, but otherwise there was a high invisible barrier between their own set and the outsiders. Not to belong to one of the old families was to be an outsider, except in rare cases like that of Disraeli, the Italian Jew, admitted by some miracle into the inner circle. Not to have been to a University was a handicap of the gravest kind, so that even Dickens could hardly overcome it in spite of his genius. Not to be able to ride or shoot, or know the points of a horse, betrayed a man to be no gentleman, and Harry knew none of those things. It was easier for a man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven than to pass the flunkeys of a house in Belgrave Square if he had not the social password.

I am not exaggerating to make a case. I am stating the simple truth as I myself remember it, not so far back as that, but still existing in my own youth. It was not, therefore, any morbid sense of self-depreciation which made Harry Verney contrast his shabby gentility with Isobel's family heritage, and his inferior status with her father's rank. It was his honest and tragic realization of a barrier between them which not even love could overleap, unless, as he said, he behaved like a cad or a criminal.

Isobel was not so sure of this. With a woman's gift of refusing to see plain facts when her heart saw more beautiful illusions, she argued with Harry that love could overcome these obstacles of social and economic difficulty. She was not only willing but eager, she wrote, to share his imaginary bed-sitting-room in Ebury Street or the Pimlico Road. He had described the dreariness of those streets and the squalor of such lodgings with a touch of that descriptive humour which he could turn on so well for the *Morning Chronicle*, but she refused to admit the dreariness.

She would be quite comfortable, she wrote, on a horse-hair sofa with broken springs if she could have his arms about her. She did not object to the hoarse shouts of hawkers selling coal and fresh fish and cat's-meat. She thought those cries had a romantic sound, especially through the murk of a London fog! If London landladies were as slatternly and hard-faced as he made out, she would try to look at them with the whimsical eyes of Mr. Dickens, who found them wonderfully amusing. He scoffed at her, she

said, because there were three footmen to open the front door in Belgrave Square, and a maid to do her hair before dinner, and a coachman to drive her about London in an elegant brougham which bore her family crest.

My dear Harry (she wrote), you know me only a little, in spite of your love, if you imagine that I am dependent upon flunkeys for my happiness, or on any kind of grandeur. I am willing to come to you in an old frock and a pinafore, and if I have to darn your socks or clean your doorstep, or cook you a humble haddock on a gas-jet, I shall be proud to serve a literary gentleman who has the flame of genius in his soul, and happy to serve a man who is kind enough to love me. So there, Mr. David Copperfield! None of your journalese for me! Kindly read "Lady Geraldine's Courtship" and take warning by it. The young man of that poem thought the lady very haughty when she was very humble, and made a most ridiculous mistake. Do you remember my telling you how poor Mr. Thorpe read out the lines with such passionate emotion?

*Softened, quickened to adore her, on his knee he fell before her,
And she whispered low in triumph, 'It shall be as I have sworn,
Very rich he is in virtues, very noble—noble, certes;
And I shall not blush in knowing that men call him lowly born.'*

Isobel's letters to Harry have a kind of gaiety in them at this time which was absent mostly from his. I think she found love liberated her spirits from nervous limitations, or perhaps his romantic gloom inspired her to cheer him up and take a brighter view of their prospects. She made fun of being a kind of prisoner in her own house. Her mother invented little engagements which would keep her away from naughtiness, such as a private visit to the British Museum. Indeed, Lady Alderton professed a new interest in archaeology and took her to the British Museum several times on the pretext of studying Greek and Roman antiquities. Her father invited her to ride with him in the Row more often than usual, and asked her to read out Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* every afternoon between five and six. Miss Venables had been reinstated after a long interview with his lordship, and had confessed to Isobel that she was under a moral pledge to inform her Papa of any hailing of hansom cabs or other abominable adventures on the part of a young lady of fashion. Isobel was taken off by her Papa and Mamma

to see ancient aunts in Mayfair and even in the outer wilds of Bloomsbury who had been long neglected. By some mysterious means, of which she could only guess the origin, invitations to luncheons and tea-parties came to her from Evangelical ladies in Clapham Park, and, accompanied by her mother, she had to sit demurely listening to conversations about the dangers of Rome, missionary enterprises in Africa, and the saintly character of the late Prince Consort.

Arthur, she wrote, was behaving like Sir Galahad, *a very parfit gentil knight*. She had not seen him since the evening when she confessed that she was not sure of her own heart and believed that she loved someone else. But she had written to tell him about Harry and he had answered in a long letter which was so charming and kind and chivalrous that it had touched her deeply. He had said very sweet things about Harry, and regretted that journalism was so ill-paid and so unjustly despised. He had pointed out very delicately that a marriage with a young man in this profession would be considered a *mésalliance* of a most squalid kind by her family and friends, and that she would need great courage to face up to such a revolt against social conventions, although he assured her that for himself he had no prejudices of that kind, being filled with admiration and envy for literary talent.

He hoped she would not marry Harry, because for one thing it would lead to estrangement from her father and inevitable unhappiness in that way, but more—infininitely more—because his own life would be stricken by a blow from which his heart would never recover. That was the selfishness of love, he supposed, and yet he would be less than candid if he did not let her know that he refused to abandon hope, that he loved her very humbly and faithfully, as he would always do, and that he would wait patiently for some word from her which would give him renewed happiness.

Oh, Harry (wrote Isobel, summarizing this letter), *I cannot think why I should be given the love of two young men so noble as you and Arthur. I am unworthy of you both. I am the most foolish creature really, and I suppose God gave me a pretty face—you think it is pretty, Harry!—because He denied me a greater share of intelligence. Honestly I blush sometimes because you and Arthur think I am so perfect, so exquisite, and so virtuous, when I am aware of my own wickedness and very naughty inclinations. I am terribly sorry for Arthur, whom I have always loved very much, though in*

a different way from our love, my dear. I hate to hurt a heart so sensitive as his, or any other. It is one of the tragedies of human life that one must hurt each other because love hurts. . . . But now, Harry, good-night ! I am writing this after a reception at Lord Stanley's, and it is time I slipped into bed, where I shall dream of you.

XXXVII

It was from one of these letters written late at night after social engagements that Harry learnt of a happening in Isobel's life which distressed her exceedingly and would lead to their separation for several years, perhaps, taking her away from London into a world even more removed from his own than the house in Belgrave Square.

Oh, Harry (she wrote, almost illegibly, and with some of her words blotted where tears had dropped on them), a terrible thing has happened to us. I have had a fearful scene with Papa and have surrendered to a sentence of imprisonment which I think will kill me because it will take me away from you and any chance of seeing you. The Queen has graciously informed Papa that she wishes me to be one of her Maids of Honour. It is, Papa says, a Royal command. I cannot possibly refuse it, he says, without disloyalty to the Queen and utter disgrace to his name and honour. I accused him hotly—I fear I lost my temper—of begging this favour from H.M. in order to get me away from Town and all my friends here, by whom I meant you, Harry, and dear Kate. He did not deny it very strongly, although he assured me that H.M. spoke to him about it when he was down at Windsor the other day with Lord Derby and Mr. Disraeli to advise H.M. regarding the political situation. For half an hour at least I refused bluntly and stubbornly to go into the Household, where I shall be nothing but a little slave without liberty or any will of my own.

I was very rude to Papa, and, looking back upon this scene, I feel that he would have been justified in boxing my ears. Poor Mamma was dissolved in tears. Even Richard was against me, and kept talking about my duty to accept the Queen's invitation, which, he said, was a great honour.

What could I do, Harry? I was tempted to run away to-night and come knocking at the door of a little house in Royal Avenue. I am tempted to do so even now, while I scribble these words—forgive my writing and these silly blots!—but of course it is impossible. I

could defy Papa and all my family. But, Harry, I cannot defy the Queen. It would be almost like defiance against God. You see, I do believe in duty and loyalty, in spite of my rebel spirit. After all, one must obey the Queen! If she sends for me I must go, even if it breaks my heart. Not even Mr. Gladstone could refuse a Royal command, and I am not Mr. Gladstone.

Oh, Harry, the prospect is appalling. I shall be shut up behind the high walls of Windsor Castle or carried off to the wilds of Balmoral. I shall be stifled by the etiquette of the Court under the vigilance of austere old ladies who will be shocked if I venture to express an opinion of my own. Perhaps I shall never see you again, dear Harry, because truly I think I shall die in such an atmosphere with no chance of meeting you. Harry, I must meet you again before I go. How can we arrange it? I must think out some plan and let you know. Whatever the risk of family wrath I must say good-bye to you somewhere alone, so that you can kiss me again.

Oh, my dear, dear Harry, I am drenching this letter with my tears. Do please forgive this dreadful exhibition of female weakness. I hardly know what I am writing. I am in complete despair. . . .

Isobel thought out a plan to meet Harry before she went to Windsor. Miss Venables was an unwilling accomplice, terrified by conscience and the fear of being found out.

It was arranged that they should take a walk in Kensington Gardens and that Harry should be waiting for them by the Round Pond. Miss Venables would retire behind a neighbouring tree for ten minutes or so, keeping *cave* lest anyone should pass who might happen to know Harry or Isobel—who did not want to risk another painful scene with her father.

This meeting duly took place. It was favoured by the weather in regard to privacy, for the first of the autumn fogs had arrived and Kensington Gardens was steeped in a filmy mist which crept about the tree trunks and made a veil for any lovers who happened to be wandering abroad. Miss Venables, not unreasonably, suggested that the sight of two women walking in a fog through Kensington Gardens might lead to suspicions of the very worst nature, and several times on the way from the Albert Gate, where they had left the carriage, she implored Isobel to turn back.

"Venny," said Isobel, "you are a coward! You are a craven soul. Do not drag behind so much."

"I promised his lordship to guard you!" cried Miss Venables

piteously. "He was gracious enough to pardon my great indiscretions on the solemn promise that I would chaperon you on every occasion."

"Well, you are chaperoning me," argued Isobel impatiently. "What else do you think you are doing? Now do put your best leg forward. I do not want to keep Harry waiting in this dismal mist."

She ignored Miss Venable's complaints, and presently saw the figure of Harry standing motionless in the fog ahead of them. She started running, leaving Miss Venables behind, and called out, "Harry!" and saw him start and come forward and raise his hat like a shadow picture.

"Isobel!"

She held out her hands to him, half laughing and half crying, and he took them and drew her towards him and clasped her in his arms.

The fog wreathed them about with a kindly veil. A few passers-by were but vague ghosts, inhuman and aloof. The miserable figure of Miss Venables hovered about a dripping tree nearest to the Round Pond but far enough away to make her almost invisible to the lovers. A mongrel cur out on a lonely adventure sniffed at Harry's heels, and then, finding him unsociable, lurched off in the direction of the Serpentine. Beyond the railings far away along Kensington Gore there was the klip-klop of horses' hoofs as hansom went their way with pot-hatted gentlemen and lonely ladies careless of their reputations or beyond the need of care.

On the smooth, unruffled surface of the pond a wrecked ship lay with its mainmast floating, the predecessor of innumerable wrecks which in sixty years since then have made this sheet of water a tragic ocean for young skippers. In Holland Street, Kensington, a German band, never dreaming above their trombones that any history would ever exile their music from London streets, played an old song of their race which afterwards became adapted to "The Frothblowers' Anthem". But Harry and Isobel heard nothing of these distant sounds, saw nothing beyond each other's eyes, knew nothing except that this was a precious moment snatched from the ugly jaws of Time. I like to think of them there in the fog, in each other's arms, with Miss Venables keeping *cave* a hundred yards away. . . . Dear ghosts! One of them is an old lady, still living.

XXXVIII

LADY ISOBEL INGLEBY went to Windsor feeling very much like Lady Jane Grey on her way to the Tower. Her words to Harry that she would wait for his letters like a prisoner watching for a ray of light through his iron bars expressed this sense of captivity which overcame her in anticipation of her life as a Maid of Honour to Queen Victoria. This was an exaggeration which she afterwards acknowledged. It was not as bad as that. On the contrary, but for her love affair with Harry and her "rebel instincts", as she called her desire to escape from social conventions, this life at Windsor might have been delightful for a pretty girl who was received very warmly by the other ladies in the Royal Household.

Looking back upon these days, she laughs now at the flood of tears which overwhelmed her when she found herself alone in a little bedroom in the Round Tower after the departure of her mother, who had come down with her. It was quite a nice little bedroom, with an iron bedstead draped in flowered chintz, and a dressing-table of painted wood covered with dimity and tied up with pink sashes. On it stood an oval mirror of the William and Mary period, and two little porcelain pots, and a very large pincushion with pink bows at each corner. There was a slit window, showing the enormous depth of the walls, built for defence against any siege, and looking out to a wonderful view of the massed foliage, autumn-tinted, in Windsor Great Forest. Below it was the Lower Ward, where two sentries in big busbies and scarlet tunics paced up and down with short, heavy footsteps, interrupted now and then by the grounding of rifles as they stood by the sentry-boxes.

In another mood, with Harry as guide and companion, Isobel's sense of romance would have been thrilled by this old castle with its towers and battlements, its courtyards and gates, and clustered roofs, and ivy-clad walls. In another mood she would have marvelled at the beauty of St. George's Chapel and remembered the chivalrous origin of the Most Noble Order of

the Garter. With Harry as a fellow visitor she would have peeped delightedly into the Horse Shoe cloisters with their weather-worn bricks, and smiled with sympathy at the old Knights of Windsor in their row of houses leading up from the great gateway.

She would have summoned up to her imagination the ghosts of this old castle, King Harry with his fat paunch, and Anne Boleyn with her pink and white complexion and the long lovely neck which she bared to the cruel axe ; red-haired Elizabeth with the villain Leicester and the hot-headed Essex. Through that slit window she would have listened for the elfin horn of Herne the Hunter, which is still heard, they say, in the Great Forest. But she found no pleasure in such thoughts on the day of her arrival. She could not bring a smile to her eyes when her mother peeped into this room and said, "What a sweet little bedchamber !"

"It is a prison cell !" she cried, distressing Lady Alderton by her look of misery.

"Cheer up, my darling," said her mother, kissing her cheek. "I am sure you will be very happy here. The Queen is kindness itself, and you will make many delightful friends. Besides, it is not for long. If you would only consent to marry dear Arthur——"

"I think Papa has behaved in the *cruellest* way," said Isobel bitterly. "He is trying to force me to marry Arthur in order to escape from this horrible place. I shall run away. I shall run off with Harry. I warn you, Mamma."

Lady Alderton turned a little pale.

"Isobel dearest, *do* be sensible ! You will break my heart if you do anything rash."

"Why should *my* heart be broken ?" cried Isobel.

Lady Alderton was very patient with her, and could hardly restrain her own tears when she left. As for Isobel, she flung herself face downwards on the little iron bedstead draped in flowered chintz and, as she wrote to Harry, "howled her eyes out", and made them so red that she had to bathe them in cold water before going down to take tea with Lady Ely and some elderly and austere dames.

From first to last she resented this exile from London, and was impatient of an atmosphere which she felt to be one of repression and heavy decorum. The recent widowhood of the Queen and her withdrawal from public life had cast a shadow over the Court. The Queen's presence—it was always referred to mystically as "the Presence"—checked the high spirits, and subdued the voices,

of the younger people. Her exalted moral character, a certain austerity which sometimes seemed stronger than her very real kindness, and the almost awful reverence with which she was regarded by all her subjects, checked any natural frivolity of young womanhood and created a sense of fear amongst those who waited upon her.

"Hush! The Queen might hear you, my dear Isobel!" whispered Lady Ely when Isobel laughed at some amusing incident as she walked with this elder lady along the Lower Ward one day, looking over the castle walls towards the playing-fields of Eton. It was not discreet, it was not even decorous, to laugh anywhere in the neighbourhood of the Queen's Majesty. Voices had to be hushed, an erring ribbon had to be tucked in hastily, smiling eyes had to become grave and demure, if Her Majesty happened to come into view.

To be summoned into the "Presence" was an ordeal before which Isobel saw some elderly women of most exalted rank, and men distinguished in every branch of life, turn pale. Ladies in waiting nearly fainted if they were called suddenly and unexpectedly into Her Majesty's private room. Old soldiers who had fought in the Indian Mutiny and the Crimean War wiped the perspiration off their brows and went weak at the knees before a private audience. Isobel herself felt her heart beat against her stays with sledge-hammer blows, as they seemed, and her face flush scarlet, when one of the ladies-in-waiting beckoned her to make her first curtsy upon the day following her arrival.

"Wait until the Queen speaks to you," whispered the lady-in-waiting before holding open the door of the room where Isobel was to stand in the Presence.

Isobel slipped inside and the door was closing noiselessly behind her. Her first thought was that her stays would burst. Her second was a sense of panic fear that when she curtsied she would fall on her nose with fright. She curtsied now on the polished boards which stretched up to a Turkey carpet and a writing-desk at which the Queen sat. Fortunately she was able to get up again. The Queen took no notice of her. She was listening to Lady Ely, who was reading out something from *The Times* newspaper.

"That is *disgraceful*!" said Her Majesty sharply and angrily, interrupting one of the paragraphs. "I cannot think how such opinions appear in an English journal. I must call General Grey's attention to it immediately. Kindly read the next paragraph."

Lady Ely read the next paragraph, which seemed even more dreadful than the first, though Isobel did not understand a word of it, being too self-conscious and alarmed.

But presently she summoned up courage to raise her eyes to the Presence, and saw the little lady, middle-aged, getting plump, dressed in a widow's cap and black gown, who ruled the greatest Empire in the world, and before whom all men bowed in reverence and awe. She was frowning slightly, and Isobel had the dreadful reminiscence of Miss Venables with the mumps. The likeness was unmistakable and ludicrous and most irreverent.

It was probably nervousness which caused Isobel to have a dreadful and terrifying inclination to giggle. Heaven alone knows what would have happened if she had committed such a breach of decorum. She was shocked at herself for such a dreadful temptation, especially as the Queen, so tiny in her chair, so plainly dressed, was invested with a dignity which needed no crown or robes to Isobel's imagination and understanding.

It seemed an interminable time while Lady Ely continued her reading, but perhaps it was not more than two minutes before she ended and the Queen spoke again.

"It is a *most* distressing article. Of course one cannot interfere with the Freedom of the Press, but I regret to see such abominable opinions expressed with such little reticence and respect. Thank you, Lady Ely. Kindly remind me to write a note on this subject to Mr. Disraeli to-night. And now, here is my new Maid of Honour, wondering when the Queen will deign to notice her. Come nearer, my dear."

Isobel advanced a little and fell into a deep curtsy. Then she glided forward and curtsied again, and knew that she was very pale.

"I hope you are glad to be here, Lady Isobel," said the Queen. "You will make some good friends, I am sure."

"Yes, ma'am," said Isobel faintly.

"I have a very great respect for your father," said the Queen. "I thought him looking in good health when he came down to Windsor last week. How is your beautiful mother?"

"Very well, ma'am," said Isobel.

The Queen looked at her and smiled.

"You have inherited your mother's good looks," she said graciously. "I hope you will not marry and run away from me too soon."

"Oh no, ma'am," said Isobel.

"Not that I am against early marriages," continued the Queen.

"On the contrary. I wish to encourage them in every possible way. But you are still very young, my dear, and I hope you will enjoy your girlhood here without thinking your duties onerous in any way. Remember that it is an honour to serve your Queen, and that she is grateful to those who do so loyally and cheerfully."

"Yes, ma'am. Yes, Your Majesty."

"In case of any difficulty," said the Queen, "Lady Ely will always give you good advice, and, indeed, you always have access to the Queen herself, who is not too hard-worked to be mindful of her ladies' happiness and comfort. That is all that need be said at the moment."

Isobel curtsied again and moved backwards, while Lady Ely resumed her duties and began to read some notes from a small book bound in red leather. Isobel wondered however she would get out of this room. The door seemed interminably far away from her. She had to open it without turning her back upon the Presence, and she fumbled for the handle like a blind man searching for a black hat in a dark room.

At last she slipped out, closed the door silently, and stood for a moment with flushed cheeks and beating heart.

"Do not look so frightened, Isobel!" whispered one of her companion maids of honour, Lady Marjorie Manners. "Was the Queen kind to you?"

"Wonderfully kind!" whispered Isobel. "But it is worse than having one's head chopped off. It lasts longer."

Lady Marjorie could not suppress a giggle at this thought, and nearly choked herself trying to stifle it with a lace handkerchief.

A low voice uttered a severe reproof.

"Lady Marjorie, you forget yourself!"

It was the Duchess of Richmond, Mistress of the Robes, horrified at this frivolity outside the very door where Her Majesty was working.

Her Majesty was working. . . . Those words had no conventional significance. Isobel came to know that the Queen was the hardest worker in her own Court, and perhaps in the whole of England. Her ladies-in-waiting and her maids of honour had hours of leisure when they could drive into the Forest with one of the Princesses, or read a book—never a frivolous novel, unless in the secret privacy of their own rooms—or gossip over their embroidery and woolwork. But the Queen had no such leisure. For health's sake she went driving sometimes with her faithful

servant, John Brown, on the box next to the coachman, and she spared time each morning for Household orders, but otherwise she stayed at her desk writing, writing, writing, and covering innumerable sheets with that fine copperplate script received next day by her ministers and officers of state, whose despatches she had read with minute and particular attention. There was no matter of political importance upon which she did not desire full knowledge, and express her own considered opinion. The appointment of a new bishop was not made without long correspondence with her Prime Minister, in which she discussed his character and qualifications, or expressed her decided objection to the recommendation.

She took the deepest and closest interest in foreign affairs, and dealt with the despatches of her ambassadors and the reports of her Foreign Secretary in a never-ending series of notes and warnings, which they could not ignore or fail to answer. She read topical debates in both Houses and commented upon the speeches with strong approval or disapproval, and sometimes with an unexpected sense of humour, in long letters to Mr. Disraeli and not quite such long letters to his political rival, Mr. Gladstone.

Although loyal to her constitutional duties and limitations, she regarded herself as the Supreme Head of the State, responsible for the safety and moral well-being of her people, with the prerogative of advice and consultation which could not be disregarded without disloyalty by any of her servants. Mr. Disraeli, that very tactful man, agreed with her always, and assured her humbly how much he was impressed by the wisdom, the graciousness, and the sublimity of any view which Her Majesty might deign to reveal to her most humble, loyal, and devoted servant, although sometimes he ventured to put forward a different side of the question which he dared to think might modify her decision. Mr. Gladstone, less tactful, ventured to disagree with Her Majesty at times, and acted quite contrary to her advice, without assuring her in advance that he was really fulfilling her own policy, though with some slight difference. But whatever party was in power, or in whatever part of the Empire history might be happening, the influence of the Queen reached out from that room in Windsor Castle where she sat in a low chair, indefatigable in the work which she considered to be her duty, with her little plump hand guiding her pen over reams of writing-paper.

There was a sense of personal contact with that little, plain,

old woman among all men who served the Empire. She was their mistress. They were serving her, and not some abstract ideal of the State. After a victory over hostile and naughty natives who rebelled against the blessings of British rule until they were converted by rapid rifle fire and field artillery, the conquering hero came back to be received in audience by the little old lady at Windsor or Balmoral. Her "Thank you, Colonel" was their highest reward, apart from professional promotion. They had tears in their eyes when she reached up to pin a medal on their manly chests. There was no insincerity or slackness in battalion messes, in English garrisons or Indian stations or African posts, when officers stood to attention at the strains of "God Save the Queen", or raised their glasses when her toast was given—"The Queen—God bless her!" There were many young gentlemen from Eton and Harrow and Winchester who died very gallantly in Abyssinia and other unhealthy places because of their devotion not only to England but to Queen Victoria, whom they were glad to serve. Mr. Lytton Strachey has made her into a figure of fun, and of course there is something rather grotesque in the artistic taste which covered gilt chairs with tartan patterns, and in the intellectual limitations of a lady whose moral influence in England was the cause of much suffering and hypocrisy in many homes. But those who knew her best and closest were most devoted to her, even though they stood in awe of her.

She was no figure of fun to Isobel and the other ladies, nor to the Prince of Wales and the gentlemen of England. Isobel herself stood in attendance one day when the Prince came to see his august mother. In the Castle there was an atmosphere of oppression and nervousness. Her Majesty was not in good humour, and, as usual, the knowledge of this seemed to permeate the household. John Brown, that Scottish servant who spoke in the bluntest way even to the Queen—perhaps that was why she trusted him so much—was rude to Lady Ely and to everyone who came in contact with him. He had bullied one of the junior footmen, who had lost his temper and told him to mind his "blooming business". Even the Queen's Indian orderlies, who looked like princes, were more stealthy in their movements and more profoundly sad than usual.

There was a coming and going of visitors, who were received in audience. Among them was Colonel Roberts, a dapper little soldier who had just come back from the fighting in Abyssinia. He passed down the long gallery with a clink of spurs and came back again with shining eyes like a knight received by his lady.

Then Mr. Gladstone came. Perhaps that was the cause of the Queen's ill-humour. The General Election had been fought and Mr. Disraeli had been defeated. Mr. Gladstone had come to kiss hands upon taking up office, and it was known that the Queen was gravely disturbed by this change of Government.

"That dreadful man!" whispered the Mistress of the Robes after Mr. Gladstone had passed into the Queen's chamber with an air of self-righteous dignity, as though not even Queen Victoria could daunt his sense of political rectitude. The whole Court regarded him as a terrible Radical who was trying to overthrow the Constitution and to undermine the Church.

But perhaps it was the Prince who was the cause of the Queen's touch of irritability that afternoon. Isobel was vaguely aware of some tales about the Prince of Wales at this time. They had been whispered to her by Lady Marjorie, and had something to do with a pretty lady and horse-racing, two subjects which leave a wide field for scandal. It is certain that H.R.H., as they called him, was not feeling happy in his mind when he stood outside the Queen's door, waiting for Mr. Gladstone to come out. He was mopping his forehead, and, to Isobel, looked for all the world like a schoolboy waiting for an interview with the head master, though he must have been nearly thirty years of age.

With a quick eye for a pretty girl, His Royal Highness seemed attracted by Isobel. He smiled at her when she dropped him a curtsy, and stood chatting with her for a few moments. But she could see that he was very nervous and was not paying much attention to what he was saying. Every now and then he loosened his collar and breathed as though the air were sultry.

"It is rather oppressive to-day, don't you think?" he said.

"It is certainly warm for the time of year, sir," answered Isobel demurely.

"Devilish," said H.R.H. "And I am afraid it is going to be warmer!"

He nodded towards the Queen's rooms, and made a comical face, and then whispered to her.

"I am in for a wiggling. . . . The Prodigal Son. . . . Heaven help me!"

Isobel checked a ripple of laughter. It seemed absurd that this grown-up man who was the Prince of Wales should be as much afraid of the Queen as any one of her subjects.

The Prince nodded to her with a smile, and then said "Good afternoon" to Mr. Gladstone, who came out with the same look of solemn importance.

It was Isobel who had a "wiggling" one day, and it nearly frightened her to death. It was only a trivial incident. She had been standing for several hours in attendance while the Queen was presiding over a meeting of ladies. Her feet ached on the polished boards, and she had a pain round her waist where her stays hurt her. There were several ladies between her and the Queen, with their silk gowns billowing. Isobel was back against a window where there was a little sill just at the right height to give her a support. She sat on this narrow edge for a few moments until suddenly one of the ladies moved from her position.

Her Majesty's eyes happened to see her maid of honour, and she called out instantly a reproof which seemed to freeze the very blood in the veins of a tired girl.

"Lady Isobel! How *dare* you recline in the presence of your *Queen*?"

Isobel straightened herself up, blanched to the lips with a sense of terror which deprived her of the power of speech. The other ladies looked at her with consternation. If she had committed an act of High Treason they could not have been more aghast.

There was a silence of death for a moment, until the Queen turned to one of the ladies and spoke to her about some undergarments for the poor of Windsor, leaving Isobel to recover her senses, which had been stunned by this dreadful rebuke.

To show any lack of respect to the Queen, even by accident, was a crime of the very gravest nature.

XXXIX

DURING those months when Isobel was at Windsor Harry resumed his normal life without the emotional interruptions which had come to him with visits to the British Museum and other convenient places for love's rendezvous. He had his journalistic work, and made friends with some of his brothers of the Press, finding some remarkable characters among them.

The old days of Grub Street had not yet merged into the newer and more respectable world of modern Fleet Street. Strange and erratic genius, which was mixed too freely with gin and brandy, had not yet been ironed out by respectability. The newspaper offices were frequented by very shabby old reporters who picked up a precarious livelihood by scavenging for news in the police courts or, if engaged on social news, in butlers' pantries. Some of the leader writers who sat in judgment on politicians and public men and guided the moral conscience of the nation were classical scholars who had failed in the Law or avoided the Church, and had decayed into a shabby and unshaven state as well as into cynicism and blasphemy.

They took immoderate quantities of snuff, which was out of fashion in other walks of life but still lingered in Fleet Street and its tributaries, and they wrote tremendous articles full of moral platitudes and classical allusions, with a plate of tripe at their elbow and a pot of beer brought in by the office boy from the Green Dragon or the Red Lion across the way. Younger men, less beery and more alert, were beginning to push their way in from the Universities or the Temple, writing brilliant articles now and then—but not often!—in the *Pall Mall Gazette* or the *World*. They reviewed the works of minor novelists, whose names are now utterly unknown, with a deadly seriousness, hailing new genius week by week as it is still hailed by their successors. They became dramatic critics and slated the plays of Mr. Robertson and other dramatists with ferocious irony, or damned them with faint praise, while they belauded *The Lady of Lyons* and other

melodramas by Lord Lytton as tragic masterpieces of classical quality.

Harry Verney found them amusing and instructive comrades. There was one of them with whom he walked home along the riverside in the small hours of the morning after delivering his article to the printers, lingering under a lamp-post to argue fiercely on some subject of life, or art, or politics, with the enthusiasm and dogmatism of youth. Harry's faith in Democracy and Liberalism clashed with the Tory creed of this fellow Press-man, who believed in the Divine Right of Kings and was a secret member of the Jacobite League, which paid allegiance to two obscure and probably fictitious descendants of the Stuarts, the elder brother retaining his seat and the younger brother rising and bowing to him when the toast of "The King" was given at public banquets. These absurdities aroused Harry's sense of humour, and his friend's reactionary views stirred him to intellectual indignation which did not interfere with a real friendship and affection for a picturesque young man who seemed to have stepped out of the eighteenth century and who lived in a bed-sitting-room in Ebury Street, where he pressed his trousers under the mattress of an iron bedstead and cleaned his own boots.

It will be seen that Isobel's absence and the ache in his heart did not prevent Harry from arguing, laughing, eating, drinking, sleeping, and performing the other functions of life. He even regained his appetite for the plum duff made for him with special regard by the little drudge in Royal Avenue. He resumed his duties in the Artists' Corps, turning up on parade in his silver and grey uniform and taking part in route marches, to the satisfaction of that very smart officer Frederick Leighton and his adjutant Val Prinsep.

At home he returned gradually to his interest in family affairs, and even consented to come down to tea when Alice Calthrop paid one of her frequent visits to his mother and Kate. He knew perfectly well what was the main object of those visits. He was not blind to the blushes, the sentimental glances, the roguishness of this pretty girl with the complexion of a milkmaid and the lips of "Cherry Ripe"—and if he had been blind, Kate would have told him anyhow, with sisterly candour and that annoying and embarrassing statement that Alice was "sweet" on him.

Secretly he was sorry for her. Being human, it was not displeasing to him that a pretty girl should be attracted by him. He remembered, without painful recollection, that as a boy he had

kissed her at Christmas parties. He remembered, not with any indignation, that as recently as the last Derby she had slept with her head on his shoulder on the way back in Richard's coach. But he was sorry that she should be disappointed. He would hate to break her little heart and to take the laughter out of her eyes, and because of this chivalrous and sympathetic feeling he coerced himself not to be sulky or aloof, nor play the Byronic part of moody melancholy when Kate or his mother arranged some family outing with Alice, or asked him to sing to her accompaniment on the pianoforte when she spent the evening with them.

So life went on as it had done before Isobel Ingleby knocked at the door of the little house in Royal Avenue. That seems to be against the tradition of the Victorian novelists, and, indeed, some of their successors, who do not allow the daily drudgery, the little trivial things of domestic routine, or the occupation of their hero in earning his livelihood, to interfere with the passionate development of a soul's tragedy.

I must, however, say that even in Victorian days a lover did not always brood over his solitude, or groan without intermission because he was separated from his beloved one. He had his job of work to do. He had to turn a smiling face to his friends. He had to take an interest in the affairs of the world. "The lover's eye in a fine frenzy rolling" had to discipline itself to notice the amount of a bill for a new pair of trousers, or to observe the state of the weather in reference to a silk hat. It is, perhaps, one of the tragic aspects of love that these commonplace things intrude upon the most spiritual and poignant passion. Even Romeo had to eat sometimes. Even Juliet had to comb her hair, poor dear.

Harry's recovery from "the sulks", as his mother called his moodiness, did not mean that he was indifferent to Isobel's absence, or that she was gradually fading out of his picture of life. She was his Beatrice, and when he was in his room upstairs, remembering that moment when he had held her in his arms, he felt like Dante when he wrote of his first meeting with his lady.

At that moment, I say most truly that the spirit of life, which hath its dwelling in the secretest chamber of the heart, began to tremble so violently that the least pulses of my body shook therewith.

There were times when he indulged in a dream that one day he might be famous and rich enough to break down the social

barrier which divided them. After all, as he argued to himself, Robert Browning had captured Elizabeth Barrett in spite of family opposition. If he could write a successful play, or a series of successful plays, the name of their author would not be so insignificant, even to Isobel's father. He need not drag her down to the squalor of the Pimlico Road. The world would not condemn him for snatching her from Belgrave Square. "The play's the thing," as Hamlet had remarked before him, and with that tremendous ambition Harry Verney sat down at his desk, devising a plot and characters which might raise him out of the depths.

Not easy! The plot would not fit into three acts. The characters would not come to life. His dialogue was stilted and unreal. It was too much his own story. The very title he had thought of—"The House in Belgrave Square"—would point too closely to Isobel Ingleby.

He wasted an incredible amount of time and an inordinate amount of good white paper over Act I and Act II of his modern comedy of manners, somewhat in the Sheridan style with a touch of Tom Taylor. He stuck hopelessly over Act III, in which his high-born heroine was to run away with a penniless artist in Chelsea, who had painted a picture which was destined to be hung on the line in the Royal Academy and to be bought for a very substantial sum of money by a rich manufacturer from Manchester.

The dream and the hope which inspired this effort kept him working at it sometimes until the small hours of the morning, when the first grey light of dawn creeping through the window-blinds was apt to dispel the dream and to show the poverty of his hope.

He groaned then in spirit. He cursed himself for a mad fool. He tried to get a grip on reality again and force himself to the knowledge, the absolute conviction, that Isobel Ingleby was utterly removed from his sphere of life. The love between them could never be fulfilled. It could be nothing but a spiritual and intellectual comradeship.

On the breakfast-table twice a week lay a letter with the Windsor postmark and the Royal Arms on the envelope, reopening his wounds, reviving his false hopes, providing the substantial material for new dreams. His sister Kate looked over the coffee-pot at him as he pocketed this precious love-letter, and teased him by some impertinent question, or merely by her smile of mockery.

"Does the Queen send her love to me by any chance, Harry? I hope Lady Isobel of the Moated Grange is feeling well within the Castle gates. . . . Do you think she could give us a ticket to view the private apartments one day? We might take down some pork pies and eat them in the Castle grounds! A charming place for a picnic, I dare say."

Harry quelled his sister by a furious glance, or his mother came to his rescue and increased his embarrassment by rebuking Kate for putting her finger into other people's pies.

"Harry might retaliate by teasing you about Mr. Thistlewood," she said one morning when some such scene had been played. "One of these fine days I shall ask that young man whether his intentions are honourable. I can't have him coming here so often and staying so late unless he means something serious."

Kate laughed at her with none of that respect which is supposed to have been the inevitable duty of Victorian girls to their mammas.

"My dear mother, his intentions are strictly *dis*-honourable. He means to take me willy nilly, and, if necessary, by the scruff of the neck, to his miserable apartments in Oakley Street, there to feed me on love, and a kippered herring when he can afford it. There I am to sit mending his socks and waiting for this mummer's return from playing third-rate parts in fifth-rate plays. As an actress, speedily gaining the admiration of the pit and groundlings, I do not wish to throw myself away for such a paltry price. Like Portia, I am not without applicants for my fair hand. I will choose the noblest and the wealthiest—unless I remain unwed and, I hope, virtuous. Richard, Lord Ingleby, hath an eye for me. Let these Thistlewoods get back to their Thistlewoods!"

"Kate," cried Mrs. Verney, laughing heartily and spilling a little coffee on her flowered dressing-gown, which she wore at breakfast, "really you are ridiculous! You know perfectly well that you are very fond of Mr. Thistlewood."

"A mummer!" repeated Kate scornfully. "A play actor! A fellow that tears a passion to tatters to split the ears of the groundlings. 'Oh, there be players that I have seen play——'"

"Get on with your breakfast, Kate," said Harry. "This isn't the Haymarket Theatre."

"Well, then," said Kate, "don't hang on to the marmalade as though it were your private mess of pottage."

Isobel's brother, Richard, still called sometimes with different

types of horseflesh and carriage-work. High-stepping animals who breathed fire from their nostrils—or looked as if they might at any moment—pawed the pavement outside the little house in Royal Avenue and attracted the gutter urchins, the butcher-boys and the nursemaids. A diminutive “tiger”, whose profession has disappeared with so much that was distinctive in England’s historic past, jumped down from the tailboard of high gigs and did a devil’s tattoo on the brass knocker.

“His lordship wishes to know if Miss Verney would care to come for a drive in the Park to-day.”

“His lordship presents his compliments to Miss Verney, and would she care to take supper with him at the Star and Garter?”

Sometimes Miss Verney answered very haughtily over the banisters that she was too busy to accept his lordship’s invitation, having to rehearse a new play. At other times Miss Verney, after a hurried consultation with her mother, flung off an old frock, jumped into a new one, and appeared on her doorstep looking as though she had taken hours to make herself look so pretty, and greeted an elegant young man who was holding in a mettlesome horse.

“Good afternoon, Richard. That’s a fiery-looking steed, God wot! I shan’t come if he bites, you know.”

“As quiet as a kitten, Miss Kate, I assure you. . . . Hold the brute’s head, you damn’ little fool!”

The last remark was addressed to the “tiger”, who held the head of a snorting dragon hired from Tattersall’s until Kate had climbed into the seat beside the young gentleman who held the reins. Then, with the skill of a toreador, this imp in top boots released the nose of the impatient beast, flung himself on the tailboard as it sprang away, and sat with folded arms and the gravity of an archbishop as it departed down Royal Avenue with a clatter of hoofs and a shower of sparks.

A modern taxi-cab does not provide the same amount of drama.

XL

ISOBEL's letters to Harry reveal her sense of being imprisoned. She yearned for the possibility of going to the theatre again to see Kate in a new part. She had a wicked and wanton wish to hail another hansom, risking parental wrath. She would have given a year of her life—she wrote—for one little hour in Royal Avenue with Harry and Kate. She missed all her London friends most terribly, and found her life at Windsor extremely wearisome because of the constant need of looking more virtuous than she really was, and behaving with a propriety which was a severe strain.

Yet her sense of humour came to her rescue, and Harry laughed over some of her descriptions, and had a secret conviction that she was not suffering quite so much as she made out.

She and Lady Marjorie Manners had become close friends and fellow conspirators in naughtiness. They smuggled into Windsor Castle three-volume novels, and even six-shilling shockers, which would have caused their instant dismissal if the Queen had happened to see them. They swore secret allegiance to Mr. Gladstone, although his name was distressing to everyone else in the Household, and his presence at Windsor now and then the cause of nervous irritability affecting the Queen's health. They were deliberately rude to John Brown, that grim servant who had the ear of Her Majesty when he walked beside her pony carriage, and who assumed an air of moral austerity not only over the other servants, but even with regard to maids of honour and high-born ladies, upon whom he spied with gloomy and Calvinistic suspicion. In their bedrooms they made toffee over a gas-jet, and relieved their sense of oppression by laughing immoderately at trivial jokes. They sent Valentines in disguised handwriting to Dean Stanley, and—a secret never to be revealed—to one of the junior footmen!

It was Lady Marjorie—her audacity stopped at nothing—who caught a small mouse one evening and put it into the bed of the Mistress of the Robes, whose shrieks when she retired to her

room might have come from a torture chamber. They reached the ears of the Queen's Majesty, who rang her bell and demanded to know the cause of this tragic noise. It was Lady Marjorie who had to answer Her Majesty's summons, and she had the very greatest difficulty in repressing her laughter. For several days the Mistress of the Robes was deeply suspicious of Lady Marjorie's air of innocence, which was too good to be true.

Oh, Harry, wrote Isobel, you will think that I am becoming a frivolous and heartless creature. But these little absurdities, this idiotic desire to seize any chance of laughter, are just a form of relief from continual repression. I laugh in order not to weep. I want to weep my eyes out sometimes when I am alone in my own room, longing for my dear lover's arms about me, and knowing that I am divided from him by these great walls of Windsor and by the cruelty of caste. Harry, what will you do if one day you find me on your doorstep? What will you say if I escape from this Royal fortress and prison and ask for sanctuary in your little house? If it were not for my duty to the Queen, and my extreme terror of offending her, I should pack up a handbag, smile at the sentries, make a dash for the station, take the train to Paddington, hail a hansom, drive to Chelsea, and hurl myself into your unwilling arms! Do not be surprised if one day my sense of duty weakens and my love gives me courage to risk even Her Majesty's displeasure. What do you say? Send me the one word "Come" and I will do it.

Harry did not send her that word. He dared not do so.

He was earning five pounds a week, and these were becoming uncertain because the editor of the *Morning Chronicle* was getting tired of his descriptive articles, and suggesting that they might be discontinued. If he found Isobel on his doorstep one day he wouldn't know what to do with her. He couldn't afford to keep her. And she and he would be up against principalities and powers. It would be an outrage against the Queen herself. He might get committed to the Tower, or something. Anyhow, it would ruin Isobel's life in her own society. She would be an outcast, and he would have dragged her down to squalor and social shame.

Some of my readers may blame Harry for a strain of cowardice, or at least for too much discretion. Why didn't he take the lady, they may say, and risk everything? That would have been the romantic thing to do, very fine and rash and heroic. But in defence I feel bound to say that Harry was not thinking of his

own embarrassment if he found the Lady Isobel on his doorstep, but entirely of her happiness. He was, in fact, a gentleman although a journalist, as a certain Mayor of Bournemouth once remarked to me.

He wrote very tender and charming letters to her, explaining once again the enormous and tragic difficulties of their situation, and then one day he had to write to her and tell her something which widened the gulf between them so that it had become a yawning chasm.

He learnt of this thing one evening when he came home from the *Morning Chronicle*. Kate was at the Haymarket as usual, playing her part in a new play of Tom Taylor's, and his first intimation that something unpleasant had happened to his mother was when the maid opened the door to him and blurted out that the missus was upset about something and had gone upstairs to her room.

"What has upset her?" asked Harry, hanging his tall hat on the bamboo stand. "Something she has eaten, do you mean?"

"Lawks, no, Mr. 'Arry! It was a visitor. An old gent with white whiskers. He stayed twenty minutes or more, and when he went away the missus started to carry on no end. Scared me, I don't mind tellin' you. Cried her eyes out, poor dear, and then smacked the cat—poor old Tim—when it jumped on her lap."

Harry went upstairs and tapped at his mother's door, and opened it when he heard her voice.

"Hullo, Mother. What's wrong?"

Mrs. Verney, who was sitting in her dressing-gown before a miserable-looking fire, pretended that nothing was wrong. What made him think anything was wrong?

"Alice says you were upset by a visitor. An old gentleman with white whiskers."

"I'll scrag that girl," said Mrs. Verney.

"Well, what did he want, anyhow?" asked Harry.

Mrs. Verney took some time in satisfying his curiosity, and even then mystified him. It appeared that the old gentleman was a lawyer who had come to discuss some business.

"Yes, but what business, Mother?"

"Don't be so inquisitive, Harry! Can't I have a few private affairs of my own? As a matter of fact it was something to do with my allowance. I mean the money I get from what your father left me."

She prevaricated, and asked him to go down and get her a cup of tea. She had a splitting headache.

When he had brought the tea she told him something rather alarming and mysterious.

"Harry, my dear, I shall have to tell you something a bit unpleasant. I wanted to keep it from you, but I don't see how I can do that. You'll have to support your mother in future unless she goes back to the stage again. The fact is, my dear, that nasty old fellow with the white whiskers tells me that I shan't get any more money. An outrage, I call it! Mean, that's what it is. I didn't know people could be so mean as all that, I really didn't! Fortunately Kate is earning a good salary. We needn't starve, that's a comfort. Make me a piece of toast, Harry. If you poke up that fire it will get red in a minute or two."

Harry poked up the fire very thoughtfully, and with a sense of dismay. What on earth did his mother mean? Why should she not get any more money?

"Mother, for heaven's sake tell me what all this is about. How can anyone stop the money my father left?"

"Well, it's come to an end," said Mrs. Verney with a nervous laugh. Finished, old boy. A great nuisance, isn't it? I'm very sorry, Harry, for your sake. You'll have to work a bit harder to keep your lady mother."

"But, Mother," said Harry, "money doesn't suddenly disappear. I suppose we were living on the interest of capital, weren't we? What my father left—the capital—can't suddenly vanish. The interest goes on."

This cross-questioning seemed to annoy his mother, until presently she laughed again and gave up avoiding his questions.

"Oh, well, if you *must* know, Harry! Just open the door for a second and see that Alice isn't listening with her ear to the keyhole, or something."

Alice wasn't listening, at least outside the door, though Harry thought he heard her on the landing below.

"You're old enough to know, Harry," said Mrs. Verney when he shut the door again. "I've kept it from you all these years, but it must come out some day, so why not now? Only don't get in a 'wax' with me, will you? I've always been an affectionate mother, I hope. I've done my duty by you and Kate. And one slip doesn't make a woman utterly bad. Besides, he always said he *would* marry me when he came into the title. He was a liar, of course. They all are, in my experience. Now I know he was mean. Oh, beyond words! I'll never forgive him for being so mean."

"Mother," said Harry in a low voice, "what on earth are you talking about?"

"Well, I'm telling you, Harry," said Mrs. Verney. "You see, your father didn't marry me quite properly. He was the son of Lord Farrington—you know—the General in the Crimean War—and there was some trouble about his marrying an actress. Well, of course, I didn't want to be unfair to him. And he said he would make it perfectly all right when he came into the title. Instead of which he went and married that Westminster girl with heaps of money! Of course I knew I had been fooled by him. They always let you down—the Nobs, as I call them. He allowed me four hundred a year on condition that I made no further claim upon him. Well, I had my pride. 'I never want to hear of you again,' I told him when he came to see me for the last time. Do you remember, Harry? He came in that coach one day. 'You were always a conceited puppy, and now I know you're a cad,' I told him. Perhaps that was a bit too hard, because I must confess I was fond of him. I wept my eyes out. But I never thought that when he died—it was in the papers yesterday, Harry—he wouldn't have made proper provision for me in his will. It was an allowance which ceased with his death. That's what I call mean. I must say so, even if it makes him turn in his grave. That horrid old lawyer came to tell me to-day that my allowance stops automatically—whatever he means by that. Well, there you are, Harry. That's the truth—and don't look so scared about it. I thought you'd be vexed."

Harry was pale as death. When he spoke again it was in a curiously harsh voice.

"That portrait downstairs," he said: "Colonel Verney. Who was that?"

Mrs. Verney laughed nervously, and her face became flushed.

"Oh, that was just to keep you quiet, Harry. A little joke of mine really. I cut it out of the *Illustrated London News*. I had to put up some kind of story for your sake and Kate's. Now don't take it so hard. It's an old story. It doesn't make any difference, except that the money has stopped. You can't say I haven't loved you, Harry."

"I'm illegitimate!" said Harry. "Doesn't that make any difference? Great God!"

He broke down with the sudden shock, and began to weep as he had never wept since he was a small boy over the tragedy of a broken toy.

"Harry! Harry, my dear! Don't take it like that! You're

my son just as much as before. I wasn't really wicked. I was just a girl deceived by a handsome young fellow. Nobody need know."

That's where she made her mistake. Isobel would have to know. The gulf had widened into a chasm between the daughter of Lord Alderton and Harry Verney, who was illegitimate.

"Oh, Mother!" said Harry, sobbing harshly in her arms like a small boy who has broken his toy. It was his life that was broken, and his house of dreams.

XLI

I AM not quite sure, I must confess, whether the fact that a man's mother had not been married "quite properly" to his father, as Mrs. Verney explained it, would put any slur upon him at the present day and prevent his marriage with a girl of good family. I have asked several friends of mine, and their opinions differ. Some of them think it would not make a shade of difference. Others think it would still be considered a grave disadvantage, to say the least of it. There is no doubt that in 1868 illegitimacy was regarded as something shameful to be hidden from all the world, unless it happened to be of Royal origin. In an Evangelical family like that of Lord Alderton such a thing could not be even mentioned without horror, at least by his lordship himself. It is true that in the genealogy of the Inglebys there were one or two unfortunate breaks of this kind, but the College of Heralds had dealt with them discreetly, and Burke's Peerage did not allude to them. They were skeletons in the cupboard, unknown except by those who had a keen nose for the smell of ancient scandals.

Harry himself was quite crushed for a time by his mother's revelation. Apart even from its effect upon his hopes and dreams, this knowledge that he was illegitimate made him feel an outcast and a pariah. It made him morbid, so that he shrank for a time from the gaze of his fellow men, as though they might see the stigma of shame upon him. It nagged in his brain so that any trivial turn of conversation, some reference to a man's grandfather, or to a runaway marriage at Gretna Green, or to the portrait of somebody's father, made him flush painfully. When Alice Calthrop came to tea and flirted with him in her amusing way, he thought, "She would shrink from me if she knew that I was illegitimate." When young Thistlewood, the actor, came courting his sister Kate he wondered if it was his duty to tell him the horrible secret.

Kate herself made light of it. He had gone into her room when she came back from the theatre late at night on the day when his mother had confessed the truth to him and had broken

it as gently as he could. To his surprise and annoyance Kate had just laughed. The revelation excited her, but she did not regard it as a paralysing tragedy. On the contrary, she was quite pleased to think that their father had been a lord, even if he hadn't been properly married to their mother.

"I always thought I had blue blood in me!" she exclaimed. "I feel it tingling at my finger-tips. It probably accounts for my haughty nature and my luxurious instincts. To think that I am descended from the Plantagenets! My word, I shall be able to snub Mr. Thistlewood if he tries to get too familiar with me. 'Stand back, varlet! I like not the smell of thy breath! Dost thou not know that I am the daughter of kings? Avaunt, thou baseborn loon, thou son of scullions and pot-house wenches!'"

Harry pointed out to her that she was illegitimate, and that she had no right to claim Plantagenet ancestors, or any others. She had no right, even, to a father's name.

Kate thought him absurd.

"Blood is blood, Harry," she asserted. "If my father was the Earl of Farrington, then all his family belong to me. You can't get away from it. Here I am! There are you! Where did we come from? If mother made a little mistake about her marriage lines, that was very unfortunate, no doubt, but you can't alter heredity, old boy. I learnt that from Mr. Jenkins when I was in the Academy for Young Ladies in Belsize Park. He used to talk about beans and sweet peas, but of course Alice Calthrop and I knew that the same laws applied to human beings. So there you are, Harry. Don't look so woebegone because you're descended from the dear old Plantagenets! It's an honour, Harry, and I always thought you looked like Prince Hal in his more serious moods."

Harry groaned. Kate was a child. She had no moral sense. She did not understand that illegitimacy was a disgrace never to be mentioned or forgotten. She did not guess that the shame of it had widened the gulf between him and Isobel so that no bridge would ever cross it.

Even Isobel admitted that it made things more difficult. She confessed that her father would regard Harry's illegitimacy as an insuperable barrier between them, whatever fame or fortune might come to him.

Harry's letter revealing this dreadful news lies before me as I write. It is a tragic letter which was written in an agony of mind. He made the great renunciation of his hopes. He implored her to put him out of her mind and heart.

You must not spoil your life by wasting your love on a man like me, he wrote. I have no money, no position, and, now, no name. Arthur Mannington was your lover first. I beg of you to accept his loyalty, his delicate and noble affection for you. On your wedding day I will stand in the crowd bareheaded and pray for your happiness. Do not look my way, but only remember that I shall be there, broken-hearted, but not envious or angry, only wishing that no cloud will overshadow your days. If we never meet again—and that, perhaps, is best—I shall think of you always as the most beautiful and the most exquisite lady whom I once had the honour of meeting, and for whom my love and adoration will be unchanging. If ever I write anything worth writing it will be dedicated in spirit to you. If my name—my fatherless name—ever becomes known, it will be because you were my inspiration. If by any chance we meet in a crowd, let me have one message from your eyes that you remember meeting me somewhere, as in a dream, but without any sense of tragedy or any painful recollection. I shall rejoice to see your beauty and your happiness, as the mother of Arthur's children, and I shall not accuse God of unkindness because my own fate might have been different. We are the children of Fate. Kismet. It is written. Because my mother was not married to my father before I came into the world, because my father inherited some strain of evil from brutal betrayers of women in mediæval times, because you are the daughter of the Inglebys and I am a social outcast, our lives were dictated for us in the Book of Fate and the plot cannot be altered. I am not whining, my dearest Isobel; I should be a liar if I pretended that I am not utterly broken in spirit and that my heart is not bleeding from this wound; but I vow to you that I desire only your happiness and that my own misery is of no importance in my judgment of what is right and true in regard to your own life.

This letter arrived at Windsor Castle by the same post as one from Arthur, who wrote to say that he was coming down in the afternoon and hoped that Isobel could see him. But the news in Harry's letter and the agonizing grief that it caused him took the pleasure out of her anticipation of Arthur's visit, which otherwise she would have welcomed, as it would be the first visit she had received from the outside world since she had been enclosed by castle walls and by the invisible and inescapable bastions surrounding the Royal presence.

She implored Lady Marjorie to make her excuses to Lady Ely and fled to her room under the plea of a splitting headache. She read Harry's letter again and wept over it. She could not

disguise from herself that his illegitimacy was a very terrible revelation. Her father would never forgive her if she were to dishonour the family by marrying a man without a right to his own father's name. Poverty and difference of class were but light obstacles compared with this stigma. Harry's genius might have made him famous and well-to-do, but no genius or fortune could do away with the shameful secret of his birth.

Isobel Ingleby was sufficiently of her time and class to think of it as a shameful secret. To marry an illegitimate man, to have children who would be without a grandfather on their father's side, to put this stain into the blood of the Inglebys, did actually seem to her alarming and tragic. It was as though she had suddenly discovered that Harry had had a murderer for his father, hanged at Newgate like the young gipsy she had known. It did not alter her love for Harry, but it made a terrible difference to their chance of happiness. It would be an outrage against her social world and her family pride.

I find it necessary to stress this sense of horror in Isobel's mind at Harry's revelation in order to throw into higher light the courage she had, and the loyalty of her love, and the fine ardent spirit of this girl in the answer she gave to Harry's letter.

I am overwhelmed by what you tell me (she wrote to him), and I know how much you are suffering, my dearest Harry. It is a secret which we must both hide as long as possible, and perhaps it need never be known outside your family and mine. But I want to say, Harry, that it makes no difference to my love. I love you for yourself, for your mind, for your genius, and for your kindness. Never will any little shadow of this dark secret, for which you have no blame, come between you and me as far as our love is concerned. It leaves you exactly as you were before, "sans peur et sans reproche". But I do admit—and I weep when I write these words, Harry—that it will be like a sharp sword between my love for you and my duty to my father and family. I should have to tell Papa and Mamma. It would not be fair, it would be cowardly, to keep it from them until we were married. But with your permission, Harry, I will tell them in strict confidence, pledging their honour never to reveal it to a living soul, on the day when you tell me that you are ready for me to come to you. I am ready to face Papa and tell him that I put love first even before family honour and social respect.

Of course, my dear, we should not be recognized by respectable society if ever the secret of your birth were discovered. We should

be social outcasts. I fear Papa would never speak to me again. I do not hide this from myself, and do not deny what you say so nobly and tenderly and unselfishly.

Oh, Harry, your letter has blinded me with tears. What you say about standing in the crowd if I were to marry Arthur is more than I can bear. I weep again at the thought of it. . . .

XLII

SHE had to break off her letter with those words because one of the Royal footmen tapped at her door with the news that a gentleman was waiting for her in the small drawing-room.

It was Arthur, and before going down to him Isobel had to bathe her eyes and dab her face with a powder-puff to hide the traces of so many tears.

Arthur was, as usual, charming and tender. He must have seen that she had been weeping, but he did not allude in any way to these signs of distress. He described his first experiences in the House of Commons very amusingly, and mentioned that Mr. Gladstone had taken particular notice of him. He regretted that his political duties would probably crush certain literary ambitions which he had cherished. In any case he had come to the decision to devote his career very seriously to politics, believing that there was a great future for Liberal thought in England, which was still extremely reactionary and intolerant of Democratic liberty.

"I want to be one of the builders of happiness for the people," he said.

Isobel listened with interest and sympathy. It was delightful to be talked to in this way for once, not as a child but as an intelligent equal. She was touched by Arthur's idealism, which seemed to her very noble, and she shared his faith in Democracy and Liberalism.

"I shall follow your career, Arthur, with passionate interest," she told him. "I am sure you will be one of our great leaders."

For a moment he was silent, looking at her with a flickering smile on his lips. She guessed that he was going to speak of his love again, but he refrained from that for some time longer while they talked about lighter things. He was sorry to hear that she regarded this life at Windsor as an exile and imprisonment.

"It is so delightful here," he said. "The view from the terrace looking towards Eton is exquisite."

"One cannot live on views, Arthur," said Isobel. "I miss London and its intellectual society."

He thought there must be many intellectual people at Windsor. The Dean, for instance, was a delightful and scholarly personality.

"You forget that I am only a maid of honour, Arthur. He regards me as a little chit not worthy of his high thoughts. Besides, I live under a sense of fear. It is hateful."

Arthur raised his eyebrows and smiled incredulously.

"Fear? Fear of what? I cannot imagine you being afraid, Isobel."

Isobel lowered her voice.

"I am afraid of the Queen. I am afraid of laughing at the wrong time. I am afraid of shocking her sense of propriety. I am afraid of doing something desperately wicked."

She told him the story of leaning against the window-ledge and those awful words, "Lady Isobel! How *dare* you recline in the presence of your *Queen*?"

Arthur laughed quietly.

"I suppose it was rather naughty of you! But I am sure Her Majesty has the kindest feeling towards you, Isobel. In fact she told me so very graciously only half an hour ago, when I had the honour of an audience."

"You have seen the Queen?" exclaimed Isobel, very much surprised. "I thought you had come down to Windsor to see *me*?"

Arthur agreed hastily that that was the most important object of his visit, the most pleasing and enchanting object. But he had had to combine pleasure with duty. The Queen had been so very gracious as to suggest to his father that Arthur should be appointed one of her equerries. Of course it was an honour which it was quite impossible to refuse, but his father had ventured to submit that such an appointment might interfere with his son's political duties, and that Mr. Gladstone had hinted that he might make Arthur one of his private secretaries.

"Her Majesty is pleased to say that she would welcome my being secretary to the Prime Minister," said Arthur.

"How is it that the Queen talked about me?" asked Isobel anxiously.

Arthur hesitated, and looked slightly embarrassed.

"I am afraid my father must have mentioned our unofficial engagement. I assure you that I said nothing at all about it. But Her Majesty asked me whether I had arranged the date of

my marriage with you. I answered with the greatest discretion and in the vaguest possible way."

"Oh, Arthur!" cried Isobel. "What did you answer? Please be plain with me. I must know exactly what you said."

She was extremely agitated by this revelation that the Queen knew something about her friendship with Arthur, even as far as that unofficial engagement which she had kept a secret from everyone.

Arthur flushed slightly and avoided her eyes.

"I told Her Majesty that you were very young, and that you were not quite sure about your own affections."

Isobel rose from her chair and went to the window, looking over the castle walls towards Windsor Great Forest with its massed oaks and interlacing branches, bare now of all foliage. She had an intuition that her fate was being arranged for her by high powers. It seemed certain to her that her father had spoken to the Queen about her love affair with a low-born young man and had begged for this position as maid of honour to keep her out of mischief. Now Arthur's father was getting to work and had spoken, or written, to the Queen about his son's matrimonial prospects. The net was closing upon her, tightening. Unless she broke away altogether she would be caught beyond a chance of escape.

With nervous fingers she began tearing at a little lace handkerchief, and then turned round and spoke sharply.

"Arthur, I have always thought you very chivalrous. I should lose my faith in human nature if I thought you were bringing pressure on me—from the Queen—to marry you. If I found that out I would never love you or have the least affection for you."

Arthur sprang to her side and took her hand.

"Isobel, I swear that such an idea has never entered my head. It was my father's indiscretion, and perhaps my own blundering in letting him think that I was practically engaged to you. He may have mentioned that in one of his letters to Her Majesty. But I vow that I will not allow the slightest influence to weigh upon you. I still hope for my dream to come true, the dream of happiness I have always had since a boy, and without which in its reality life is quite worthless to me. But unless your love is given to me freely, I will not ask for it. I only want your happiness, my dearest Isobel."

Isobel had two lovers who wanted only her happiness. She thought of that for a second when he spoke those words. They

were what Harry had written in the letter she had read before Arthur's visit. It was tragic to think that both of them were unhappy for her sake, and that both their hearts might be broken because of a hopeless love for her! Harry's dreadful secret would make it impossible for her to marry him unless she broke away utterly from her family and friends. She understood that without illusion, and believed that Harry would not accept this sacrifice however willing she might be to make it. Arthur's dream would never be fulfilled if she were loyal to Harry's love. And Harry would still be in despair if she could not marry him. It was a dreadful predicament for a girl who had no hardness of heart and believed in romantic love, not yet undermined by the modern psychology of Freud and his disciples.

"Arthur," she said, "forgive me for doubting you. I am very grateful to you for your kindness. One day I will tell you how my heart is torn. But it involves someone else—a secret I cannot let you know."

"I do not ask you to tell me," said Arthur in his chivalrous way. "If I may go on hoping just a little——"

He took her hands and raised them to his lips.

XLIII

"ISOBEL! Quick! The Queen wants to speak to you!"

It was on the morning following Arthur's visit. Isobel was in her bedroom, reading Harry's tragic letter again, when Lady Marjorie came bursting in. She turned white at this unexpected summons to the Presence. She was not properly dressed. She had loosened her stays, and little white ribbons were peeping above her bodice.

"Heaven help me!" she cried. "My stays are undone!"

Lady Marjorie helped to tie her up with quick fingers.

"Quick!" she cried again. "Lady Ely is fussing like a startled hen! Off goes your head, my dear, if you keep the Queen waiting! Lord! There is another ribbon writhing like a snake above your bodice! Run! Fly! Do not stand upon the order of your going——"

Lady Marjorie Manners enjoyed the drama of this excitement. Her eyes shone with laughter. But Isobel saw no fun in this summons and fled with flushed cheeks and beating heart down the stairway leading to the Queen's apartments.

"My dear!" whispered Lady Ely in some alarm. "The Queen sent for you *three minutes* ago!"

"I am terribly sorry," said Isobel.

She was extremely flustered. Her breath came quick as she entered the Queen's little room, where she sat as usual at her writing-desk. But for a moment or two Her Majesty took no notice of her maid of honour, who curtsied just beyond the door. She was reading some State paper with deep attention, holding a quill pen poised over it.

Presently she gave a sigh, and then wrote her signature to the document with that long flourish to the V of Victoria as fine as copperplate.

"Come here, child," she said, looking up at Isobel. "What a pretty complexion you have this morning. Like a rose!"

Isobel drooped into another deep curtsy and the colour of her cheeks deepened.

The Queen smiled for a moment as though she were pleased with the pretty look of this maid of honour.

"I had the pleasure of seeing a young friend of yours yesterday," she said good-naturedly. "I dare say you can guess that I mean Lord Mannington. He seems to me a modest and charming young man. Do you not agree, Isobel?"

"Yes, Ma'am," said Isobel timidly, and blushing even deeper.

"I thought you would not *dis-agree* with me," said the Queen, smiling again. She tapped Isobel's hand with the end of her quill pen.

"I understand the young man is very much in love with you, my dear. Can you confirm that rumour?"

Isobel was still flustered and frightened. She could hardly bring herself to answer.

"Arthur and I have always been friends, Ma'am," she said in a low voice.

"Quite so," said the Queen. "His father told me so one day, when he came to Windsor with Lord Derby. Well, my dear, it will be a very good match for you. I should like you to know that your Queen approves of it thoroughly. I am very willing to release you from your duties as soon as the date of your wedding is arranged."

"Oh, Ma'am!" said Isobel. "Oh, your Majesty!"

Her face was no longer flushed. The colour fled from it. She felt cold, and there was a little moisture in the palms of her hands, due to fear.

"I do not hold with long engagements," said the Queen; "and I hear that young Lord Mannington may be appointed as private secretary to Mr. Gladstone. For his sake I think you ought to get married before Parliament meets. Let me see, now . . ."

The Queen turned to a calendar framed in red leather, and ran her quill pen over some of the dates.

"January the fifteenth. Yes. That would be very suitable. Of course you will be married in St. George's Chapel, Isobel, and the Queen will honour you with her presence."

"Oh, Ma'am!" cried Isobel, even more fearfully.

She wanted to cry out that she could not possibly marry Arthur on January the fifteenth, and that she was in love with a young man named Harry Verney. But her courage failed her. She was in a state of terror. She could not utter a word beyond that pitiful, "Oh, Ma'am!"

"Very well, then," said Her Majesty. "We will consider that arranged. You will inform your dear parents, and Lady Ely will speak to the Dean about the arrangements for the wedding."

She raised her little plump hand over the bell on her table, but paused before she struck it.

"You have my blessing, Isobel. I have every belief that you will be worthy of a very noble young man and will do your duty to God and your Queen as a wife and mother. That is all, child."

She struck the little bell on her table.

Isobel withdrew, almost colliding with Lady Ely as she left the Queen's room, and then rushing upstairs to her bedroom again, still white to the lips.

Her fate was closing about her. The Queen was arranging the date of her marriage with Arthur in three weeks' time. The wedding was to be in St. George's Chapel, and the Queen would honour it with her presence. She was a bird caught in a net. No use to flutter her wings. No use to beat her heart against the meshes. If only she had told the Queen everything—about Harry—about her tragic love—about her fearful predicament between two lovers—she might have found some way of postponement. But like a frightened fool she had only curtsied and drooped her head and said, "Yes, Ma'am." And the Queen had made a note in her diary as though the Recording Angel had entered Isobel's wedding day in the Book of Fate.

It was too late to protest, to cry out that if she married anyone it would be Harry. "January the fifteenth . . . that would be very suitable," said the Queen. When the Queen said anything there was nothing more to be said. Her wish was a command. There was no one in the whole land who would dare to disobey her. How could Isobel disobey and tell the Queen that nothing on earth would prevail upon her to go into St. George's Chapel with Arthur Mannington, not even the Queen's presence nor Lady Ely's arrangement with the Dean of Windsor, nor all the Royal choristers in their crimson gowns?

"What on earth is the matter?" asked Lady Marjorie, peeping into her bedroom to hear whether she had had a "wiggling" from the Queen for being three minutes late in answering her bell.

"Marjorie, I am being married against my will!" cried Isobel wildly. "There is no liberty in England! Women are just *slaves*! The Queen is a tyrant! I detest her!"

Even Lady Marjorie was shocked by those last dreadful words.

"Isobel! For heaven's sake! Have you gone mad or something?"

She sat down on Isobel's bed, caught hold of her hand, and tried to calm this hysterical outbreak. In need of some human comfort and friendship, Isobel told her about Harry, keeping back only the secret of his illegitimate birth, and Lady Marjorie listened breathlessly to this romantic love story, so much more thrilling than any novel because so true and close to life.

But she was discouraging in her verdict.

"I am frightfully sorry, Isobel," she said, "but you will have to marry Arthur. I do not see any way out for you. The Queen has fixed the date, you see. By this time Lady Ely will have sent a note to the Dean. And, after all, my dear, I must say that I think Arthur is more suitable than the other young man. Of course, I have no doubt he is very charming, but if he has no money and not many prospects, I do not see how you *can* marry him! Besides, it is rather dreadful to think that he is a journalist and the brother of an *actress*! Blood is blood, after all, my dear. And then you confess yourself that you are very fond of Arthur. Of course, personally, I think marriage is hateful anyhow. It is the end of all dreams. One just becomes a married woman, does one not? But if one *does* make the sacrifice, I think it ought to be with someone of one's own class."

"Oh dear," cried Isobel, "you are only making things worse, Marjorie! I have a good mind to run away. If I had any courage——"

She had no courage sufficient to make a private rebellion against Queen Victoria. At least her courage failed her for a few days, and every day made her situation more difficult. The Queen wrote a note to her mother, congratulating her on her daughter's engagement and expressing the intention of being present in St. George's Chapel on January the fifteenth—*"a date (wrote Her Majesty) which Isobel has accepted dutifully, as, of course, was only to be expected of a charming and obedient young woman."*

This letter from Queen Victoria is now in the possession of the lady who was Isobel Ingleby. At the time she only knew of it by a few words quoted in a letter from her father, who wrote very kindly and tenderly, expressing his deep pleasure that she had made up her mind to marry Arthur, *"for whom*

(said Lord Alderton), *I have a very high respect as a young man of superior intelligence, admirable character, and high ideals, contrasting more than favourably with the frivolous, disorderly and vulgar youth of an age which sometimes fills me with despair.*" He regretted once that Arthur had departed from the old political creed and had given his allegiance to Mr. Gladstone, for whom Lord Alderton had no enthusiasm.

It is probable, however (he added), that Arthur may become more Conservative as he grows older; and in any case it is a safeguard of the Constitution that men of his social standing in the ranks of the Liberal party should modify the rash enthusiasm of a fanatical leader by belief in tradition and loyalty to their Sovereign and country.

For yourself, my dear Isobel, I can only say that I believe you will have a happy marriage and uphold the dignity and honour of the high position you will have as the future Countess of Amersham. There have been times when you have caused me anxiety by your spirit of revolt against the essential proprieties of your social state and against the religious and moral principles which I have inculcated since your childhood. I realize that you have regarded me sometimes as having been unnecessarily severe. Believe me, my dearest Isobel, that I have only acted according to my sense of Duty and that I have never failed to have for you the most affectionate sentiment. It is a real joy to me to know that there will be no shadow of misunderstanding between us now that you have consented to your marriage with Arthur. Her Majesty's gracious presence at your wedding is an honour which I am sure you appreciate. Your mother is anxious to know what young ladies you have chosen to be your bridesmaids, and what arrangements you are making about your trousseau. Doubtless she has already written to you on those points, and I need only add that I shall begrudge no expense in fulfilling any reasonable demands you may make upon my purse for the happy day. I should like you to wear the lace which my own dear mother used for her bridal veil, which was given to her by the Duchess of Kent.

*Believe me to be, my dear Isobel,
Your affectionate and loving
Father.*

This letter arrived by the same post as one from Lady Alderton, who wrote very tenderly to congratulate Isobel on her happy decision.

I am rejoiced (she wrote) that Arthur will be our dear son-in-law. I am sure, darling, that he will be a kind and loving husband, which is the most precious gift that any woman may have.

Isobel read these letters with tightened lips. They took for granted a decision she had not made of her own free will. They fastened her down to the Queen's arrangement against which she had not dared to raise her voice because she had felt like a little white mouse in the presence of a tabby cat of the most imposing and terrifying power. The whole thing was being settled over her head. Even over Arthur's head. For Arthur was in complete ignorance of what had happened until he received a letter of congratulation from Lord Alderton and his own father.

He had naturally assumed that Isobel had given her consent freely, and he wrote a letter to her late at night on House of Commons notepaper, expressing his overwhelming joy.

I am desperately awaiting your letter (he wrote). It seems to me strange that I should have heard these wonderful tidings from your father before receiving a word from you. Doubtless you sent a letter to my country address which some fool of a servant has delayed to forward. I remember I told you I was going down there for a few days. Meanwhile, my darling, I want to tell you once again that I am the happiest man on earth when I think that we shall go through life together, and that your beauty and your love will be with me whatever the adventure that lies ahead. I dedicate myself to your service with the same sincerity as when I knelt before you as a boy, playing at romance and yet with a sense of fealty which has never left me and never will. I am utterly unworthy of you, Isobel, but I shall be ennobled by your sweetness and innocence and loveliness.

These letters needed answers. Isobel could not answer them. Each word drove her closer to the altar, dragged her farther away from poor Harry, who knew nothing of all this. By silence she had consented and went on consenting.

Lady Ely pressed her hand and said, "Warmest congratulations, my dear! . . . Such a worthy young man!" The Dean of Windsor wrote her a few lines expressing his great pleasure at the thought of her coming marriage in St. George's Chapel, and wishing her great blessings. One by one all the ladies-in-waiting spoke a few words of excited congratulation,

and even the Royal servants seemed to have heard the news and smiled at her in a friendly way and bowed rather more deeply when she passed, and, absurd as it sounds, gave her an extra serve of plum duff at luncheon on the morning when the news leaked out.

Even John Brown, that grim Scotsman with knobby knees under his kilt, smiled over his reddish beard and had the impudence to speak to her.

"Hair-rr-ty congr-rr-atulations, Lady Isobel! You're gaun tae wed a bonny gentleman, I'm tauld on high authority."

"I am afraid it is only a rumour, Mr. Brown," said Isobel icily, seeing his jaw drop and his hand go up to his whiskers as she passed.

That afternoon she handed a telegram to one of the bedroom maids and asked her to send it off from the post office in Windsor Old Town, where her people lived. It was to Harry Verney, of 32 Royal Avenue, Chelsea, and was a brief message.

Meet me at Madame Tussaud's four o'clock to-morrow afternoon.

Isobel.

XLIV

HARRY received the telegram from Isobel when he was having tea with his mother and Kate and one or two friends. Mr. Thistlewood of the Haymarket had come in and was giving an imitation of Charles Kean as Louis XI, followed by a description of a farmyard at dawn. Alice Calthrop was helping Harry to toast some crumpets which he had just bought at the front door when the muffin man came down the street ringing his bell. The double rat-tat on the door-knocker interrupted Mr. Thistlewood's rendering of farmyard noises and the laughter of Mrs. Verney and Kate, who were highly appreciative of his dramatic talent.

"A telegram for Mr. Harry," said the little maid, coming in with her cap on one side and a smudge on her apron.

Harry opened it, expecting a message from the Editor of the *Morning Chronicle*, and then read Isobel's words and felt his heart give a lurch as he slipped the little red envelope into his jacket pocket.

"Anything important, Harry?" asked Mrs. Verney.

"No," he said, telling the most tremendous lie that had ever come to his lips. "How are the crumpets getting on, Alice?"

By the greatest good fortune one of the crumpets fell off Alice's toasting-fork, and her shriek of dismay, followed by Kate's laughter, diverted attention from the telegram.

"Harry, quick, for the love of heaven!" cried Alice Calthrop. "Hand me a knife so that I can scrape off these cinders."

"Who do you think is going to eat that filthy-looking mess?" asked Kate hilariously.

"It's perfectly clean dirt," said Alice. "Carbon of the purest quality. As Mr. Jenkins used to say, 'Carbon, my dear young ladies, is one of the elementary substances most widely diffused in nature.'"

This reminiscence of the Academy in Belsize Park delighted Kate, who told the exciting story of how she was expelled.

Alice Calthrop interrupted it once by an appeal to Harry.

"Look out, Harry, or you will be like King Alfred when he burnt the cakes."

She leaned her head closer to his and whispered to him.

"Why are you looking so worried all of a sudden? Bad news in that telegram, Harry?"

"No. Not at all. Only this fire is a bit hot, don't you think?"

He tried to take part in the conversation at tea-time, and tried even more valiantly to laugh at Thistlewood's funny stories about provincial tours and theatrical lodging-houses. There was an outrageously funny story about a flea, but Harry lost the thread of it. Over and over again he saw the words of the telegram inside his pocket: *Meet me at Madame Tussaud's at four o'clock to-morrow afternoon. Isobel.*

He was excited and troubled. It would be marvellous to meet her again at Madame Tussaud's, where once they had lost Miss Venables with deliberate intent. But what was going to happen then? He had not heard from her for a week, not once since her answer to his letter telling her the secret of his birth, which had made no difference, she wrote, to her love. In other letters before that last one she had told him that he might find her one day on his doorstep. In one of them she had said, "If you say the one word 'Come', Harry, I will come, risking everything." Was she coming to him now by way of Madame Tussaud's? Had she decided to escape from Windsor Castle and Queen Victoria, and her own family and friends, to seek a sanctuary in this little house in Chelsea?

Harry Verney lost the thread of that funny story about a flea. He felt hot and cold waves surging through his body and brain. Absurd anxieties about trivial details nagged at him.

Where could Isobel sleep in this poky little house? She might share Kate's room for a few nights.

How could he afford to keep a wife, now that his mother had lost her allowance? Only yesterday the Hairy Man—old Esau—had warned him again that his weekly article would come to an end before long. Unless he could get some regular work of the same kind they would all be in Queer Street. Even Kate's salary would be discontinued when Tom Taylor's play came off at the Haymarket in a few weeks' time. Isobel would come to a poverty-stricken house. There might not be enough food for her when tradesmen became impatient about their bills. The daughter of Lord Alderton would find herself in a gipsy camp.

Kate was nothing but a gipsy, utterly careless of conventions and proprieties. His mother had lapses into vulgarity sometimes. Isobel would soon find out that this was not her kind of world, nor her kind of people. . . .

What a fool he was to allow such thoughts to creep into his brain! He was simply dreaming ridiculous fantasies without reality. Probably Isobel had come up to town to see her people. She was taking the opportunity to meet him for a few minutes. She might even tell him that she had decided to marry Arthur after all. She might give him the *coup de grâce* among the wax-works.

After a sleepless night—when his mother once, at an hour after midnight, banged her chair on the floor because he kept pacing up and down—and a restless morning during which he could neither write nor read, Harry put on his best suit with a flowered waistcoat and a tall hat, and, avoiding his mother's room lest she should make embarrassing inquiries, left the house and walked up Sloane Street and through the Park to Madame Tussaud's.

He was an hour too soon, and while he waited on the steps of that famous institution the minutes seemed incredibly long. A hundred times at least he looked at his watch, astounded to find that the hands had hardly moved since he had last seen them. Many omnibuses passed up Baker Street, and the red-faced drivers, huddled up on the box seats with old top hats jammed over their ears because of the east wind blowing gustily on this winter day in the year of grace 1868, shouted out blasphemous remarks to their tired horses, or humorous remarks to old ladies waiting on the kerbstones in black bonnets and Paisley shawls.

Up the steps of Madame Tussaud's came the usual stream of visitors—country folk with children clinging to their skirts, little girls in long drawers holding the hands of anxious governesses; here and there an obvious pair of lovers, arm-in-arm, the girl blushing and laughing, the young man looking into her eyes ardently and whispering nonsense. Some of Dickens's characters passed Harry Verney, who recognized their types. Surely that was Sairey Gamp, breathing heavily and showing a pair of white socks above elastic-sided boots as she came up the steps! And that tall man with tight trousers and a jacket too short at the sleeves, and a top hat planted rakishly over his right eyebrow, and a pair of black gloves which had lost their buttons, was surely Mr. Micawber, waiting, as usual, for something to turn up!

The tall man paced up and down the steps, stared at Harry Verney, and once stopped to make a polite inquiry in a bland voice.

"Pardon me, sir, but can you oblige me with the right time?"

"Certainly," said Harry. He had no need to look at his watch, though he looked at it. "Exactly seventeen minutes to four."

"I thank you," said the gentleman, endeavouring to button up one of the gloves which had no buttons. "And so, as the immortal Bard says, 'from hour to hour we ripe and ripe, and then from hour to hour we rot and rot'."

"Exactly," said Harry dryly, turning on his heel and pacing to the other end of the portico. He did not wish to be involved in a conversation with the Micawber-like gentleman, who would probably request a small loan.

Seventeen minutes more. . . . Fifteen minutes more. . . . Ten minutes more.

Isobel was ten minutes late. He saw her at last, jumping down from the step of a hansom cab and holding up a piece of silver to the driver. She was in a green frock trimmed with fur, and wore a little fur toque over her hair with its luxuriant chignon. In another moment she saw him, and in one more she had clasped his arm.

"Harry! . . . I am terribly late. . . . Forgive me."

Harry was speechless for a few moments. His heart was beating furiously and some little drummer was tapping in his ears. Then he stammered out a few words, absurdly formal.

"How did you get away from Windsor?"

She laughed excitedly.

"It was not easy. I had to make up a little story. Lady Marjorie—you remember I have written about her?—helped me by pretending I was not well. I think even the sentries were suspicious when I went through the gateway. One of them—a tall young giant—winked at me! Wasn't that *dreadful*?"

"Did you take the train to Paddington?" asked Harry, still with that ridiculous formality because of his intense emotion.

"Yes, I took a first-class ticket, of course, but I was so flustered that I jumped into a third-class carriage. One of the Royal footmen was in the corner. He recognized me instantly, though I pretended not to see him and buried myself in a novel by Mr. Meredith. If he tells that odious John Brown my reputation is lost! Because John Brown will tell the Queen,

and then all will be discovered, as they say in the penny dreadfuls. . . . Harry, are not you pleased to see me? Do not look so grave, my dear. You do not mind my holding your arm like this?"

"I want you to hold my arm," said Harry, "and I am weak with joy at seeing you. Where can we talk?"

"Let us go inside and find a quiet corner. There is so much to talk about, Harry! I do not know how I shall tell you all there is to say. And I have only half an hour to say it in, if I go back to Windsor this afternoon before my absence is found out."

"Only half an hour!" exclaimed Harry. "Great heavens!"

They went into Madame Tussaud's and wandered through the rooms, searching for a quiet corner. The country visitors were gazing at the tableaux of historical episodes in awe and amazement. The little girls in the long white drawers were holding the hands of their governesses, afraid lest some of these wax figures should be really alive. The obvious lovers were hand-in-hand before the Execution of Mary Queen of Scots and the Death of Queen Elizabeth and the Game of Bowls on Plymouth Hoe before the Great Armada. Harry Verney and Isobel Ingleby found a quiet corner in the room devoted to Lady Jane Grey before she laid her head upon the block. It was almost dark there, and the people who came in were hardly visible as they stood for a few moments and then passed on to other tableaux.

"Harry," said Isobel, still clasping his arm, "I am caught in a net. I do not know how to escape. The whole world is against us, Harry. The Queen has put me in a trap. I am being dragged away from you, my dear. How can I tell you?"

She tried to tell him all that had happened—about Arthur's visit and the Queen's talk to her, and her own cowardice in saying nothing except "Yes, Ma'am," and "No, Your Majesty," until the Queen had arranged for the date of her wedding and written to her father and mother and sent word to the Dean of Windsor about January the fifteenth.

"Harry, I have been suffering agonies. I had not the heart to write to you. I do not know what to do. I am frightened, Harry. To disobey the Queen is terrible. Harry, what shall I do? Tell me what you want me to do. Help me to be brave. Let me know what is in your own mind, Harry."

"I want you to be happy," he said. "Nothing matters except that."

"How can I be happy?" she asked in a low voice, because two people came in to see Lady Jane Grey kneeling before the block with the headsman waiting with his sharp axe.

"Harry," she whispered, "if I do not marry Arthur I shall break his heart. But if I do not marry *you*, my dear, what will happen to *your* heart—your dear heart—the heart I love best?"

"My heart doesn't matter," said Harry. "It is only you, Isobel—your future life—your chance of happiness. I am nothing. I am horribly poor. You see, I shall have to keep my mother now. I couldn't make a home for you—worthy of you. I should disgrace and dishonour you. And you love Arthur, Isobel. He was your lover before we ever met. I am only a passer-by, outside your world."

"Harry," she whispered with a sob in her voice, "I shall always love you. I am torn in pieces. I can feel my heart bleeding. Harry, I want to kiss you!"

The room was almost dark. With their backs to Harry and Isobel stood three or four people, staring at Lady Jane Grey and the shining axe of the headsman. Harry was more nervous than Isobel, because men are like that. He glanced anxiously at the dim figures beyond them.

But Isobel's hand had already slipped up to his shoulder, her cheek was pressed against his, and he was human and in love. He put his arms about her and held her tight, and kissed her a score of times there in the half-darkness before the waxworks.

Several people glanced at them and turned away, some gravely shocked, perhaps, and some, no doubt, amused. It was not the first or last time that lovers kissed in the gloom of Madame Tussaud's.

Isobel was weeping a little. Harry felt her tears upon his cheek. He felt like weeping too, because he knew that this was the last time that he would hold Isobel in his arms and the last time that he would kiss her. They both knew, and clung to each other, unable to speak, unwilling to end this embrace which would leave them utterly apart for ever.

Poor dears! I am sorry for both of them in that last half-hour of their love. Even then, if Harry had said, "Come away, Isobel. Come home to my little house in Royal Avenue," she would have gone with him and broken with all her past and shared his poverty. . . . Perhaps it wouldn't have worked. Perhaps Harry was kind in not taking his chance. She thinks so now, after all these years.

Isobel married Arthur in St. George's Chapel, Windsor, and became a great lady in Victorian England. I had the honour, when I was a young man, of being invited to her receptions, and paid homage to her as one of the most beautiful hostesses in London. Harry, of course, married Alice Calthrop, and there is no need for me to mention his plays. They were famous in their time, with his sister Kate playing the leading lady, and last year one of them was revived with some success, though the critics said it "dated", and laughed at its sentiment and simplicity.

"Yes, I suppose we were rather sentimental," says the old lady who was Isobel Ingleby. "But it's better than being hard and cynical. We weren't ashamed of tears. We believed in romantic love, and we thought rather well of life."

I marvel again at the end of this story, as I did at the beginning, that people now living, with all their wits about them, should have bridged that tremendous time of change from England which was still mediæval in its traditions—at least in the old families—to this England now, with democracy triumphant and the machine age in full blast. Arthur Mannington's Liberalism has lost its meaning, and even the Liberal Party hardly survives as a wreck of its former greatness. The principles of liberty for which it stood are despised, or at least neglected, even by the democracy which gained its victories by them.

The old aristocracy—the landed gentry of England—have lost their power, their privileges, and their wealth, not without some loss in other values worth preserving. Taxed living and dead, their land which made the beauty of England is being cut up into building estates, and democracy, eager to get a share of this beauty, finds that in getting it they have despoiled it. The old tradition and culture which existed in many homes like that of Arthur, Lord Mannington, have gone with the pictures on the walls, sold to pay for death duties, and with old mantel-pieces, furniture, tapestries, and manuscripts, bought by American dealers to decorate the homes of Chicago manufacturers and the museums of American cities. Individuality of character, which created English genius, is being ironed out by a standardization of intelligence, due to millions of minds reading the same newspapers, having the same education, and being subject to the same machine-made drama and music. A World War blotted out an enormous sum of young life, noble character, fine intelligence, which has not yet been replaced, and will never be replaced. And the Machine Age, speeding up its pace day

by day, drives relentlessly and furiously away from tradition to a new world in which the old moralities, the old values, the old peace of the human mind, have no certain place. The Golden Years of the Victorian Era, when England became fat and prosperous, have been followed by lean years in which the old reserves of wealth are almost exhausted and England's supremacy in trade, based upon cheap labour and slum conditions, has been challenged by many rivals.

Writing this story of Victorian life, I try to get a balance between what we have gained and lost, and it is not easy, for we have gained much and lost much. How far the pendulum has swung since Isobel trembled in her father's presence and hailed a hansom with a sense of high adventure! How far since Mr. Gladstone was regarded as a dangerous demagogue by the Conservative mind of his time!

The old lady who remembers herself as Isobel Ingleby regrets many pleasant aspects of Victorian life, but she is not darkly pessimistic about the present age or its younger people.

"I believe after all," she says, "that there is more happiness for more people in the world to-day. At least we don't wear bridal gowns made by starving seamstresses. We were rather cramped in our ideas, my dear. And I like the young people who talk to me sometimes. They are very fearless in facing life. Isn't that good? There is more fresh air in the world to-day, in all its little homes and in people's minds. Caste doesn't count so much. There is not so much intolerance. Oh, of course, I know that my crowd are all ruined, and perhaps England too. It looks as though our Empire were going. Well, we had a long innings, and poverty won't hurt us if we keep our courage and our sense of humour. *Tout passe, tout lasse, tout casse*. I'm sorry they're cutting down so many trees and driving those ugly roads through the countryside. One can't replace beauty. Well, perhaps we'll all be in the air before I die. I'm thinking of learning how to fly. They say it's quite easy! . . . Did you say *two* lumps of sugar, my dear?"

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NALLA'S early life gives us a glimpse into a typical Malay *ménage*, and his subsequent career carries us the breadth of the Peninsular. During the war Nor Nalla was employed in North France and England doing detective and Secret Service work, and had escapes equally hair-raising with those he had experienced in his native jungles. *Illustrated, 10s. 6d.*

FIRST REVIEW

"There is no reader of Kim who would not like to meet another of his species. That being so it is both a duty and a pleasure to announce where he can be found. . . . A more enthralling volume of secret service could not be desired."—OBSERVER.

Leaves From a Bookmaker's Book THOMAS HENRY DEY

"OH, that a man might know the end of this day's business, ere it comes." With this remarkably apt quotation Mr. Dey prefaces his entertaining and original book.

It is not necessary for the reader to be a sporting man to appreciate the many stories which Mr. Dey has to tell, for although he claims, in the main to be a bookmaker, it is very evident from a perusal of the pages, that his business career has had many ramifications apart from that of a layer of odds. Many famous people appear in these lively pages; people in every sphere of life and who have made their mark in the worlds of finance, law, business, and the stage; and about many of them Mr. Dey has stories to tell. *With a frontispiece, 6s.*

History

Two Lone Ships

"Goeben" & "Breslau"

GEORG KOPP

(Wireless operator on board the *Goeben*)

THE author of this book was on board the *Goeben*—the fastest ship in the Mediterranean—when in August, 1914, she and the *Breslau* made their thrilling escape from the Allied fleets and successfully dashed to Constantinople through the Dardanelles. This exploit is famous, but less widely known is the subsequent war-career of these two ships. *Illustrated, 10s. 6d.*

FIRST REVIEW

"This first-hand account of life on the two escaping German Cruisers is so speedy and splendid and the friends to whom I have lent it are so lyrical in their praises, that I notch it up again."—
ROGER PIPPETT in DAILY HERALD.

In the Enemy's Country

JOSEPH CROZIER

(Lieutenant Pierre Desgranges, of the 2nd Bureau de
l'État-Major)

THIS quite amazing book tells in the first person of the war adventures of Joseph Crozier, a secret agent known to the inscrutable Second Bureau of the French General Staff as "Lieutenant Pierre Desgranges". During the most dangerous years of the War, M. Crozier directed the French espionage in Germany from Holland. The story of his ingenuity, of the perils he ran, of the secret organization he built up behind the enemy's lines, of the hidden and often fatal warfare it conducted against the German counter-espionage, and of the several fates of its members, forms a grim epic of the great struggle. *With a Frontispiece, 7s. 6d.*

FIRST REVIEW

No one can complain that it lacks excitement."—
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The Home Front

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Author of "Secret Chambers and Hiding Places", etc.

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Travel

To the South Seas

GIFFORD PINCHOT

THERE is no region on earth so many people would like to visit as the South Seas. There is no region so filled with glamour and romance. This book takes you there and makes you feel as if you had made the cruise yourself. It tells how a dream of a lifetime—a cruise in his own schooner to the South Seas—was carried out by Mr. Pinchot after forty years.

The party had many adventures. They caught fish so big that surf broke on their backs as if they were reefs. They barely escaped being wrecked on a desert, waterless island. They visited the most beautiful islands and walked among wonders, recording them in photographs. The story is told simply, just as it happened, and with a quiet humour that makes it easy reading.

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FIRST REVIEW

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(The famous novelist)

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Natural History

How Animals Live

J. MOREWOOD DOWSETT

Author of "Big Game and Big Life", etc.

ASSOCIATED with animals from his earliest years, and blessed with an incurable roving disposition, Mr. Dowsett has gained rich experiences in many lands. Under the blazing African sun and in the frozen wastes of Canada he has proved himself a hunter of no mean ability, and he has been described by Mr. Cunninghame Graham as "one of those intrepid spirits to whom no adventure comes amiss".

Now at last Mr. Dowsett has been persuaded to sum up, in this volume, the knowledge begotten of his experiences. The result is a simple but exhaustive review of the problems caused by mankind's contact with wild and domestic animal life. We are shown animal nature as it really is, and are urged to cultivate a better understanding of it. Mr. Dowsett is convinced that animals possess reasoning power in greater or lesser degrees, and adduces some striking instances to demonstrate his case.

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IN the course of a lifetime, however adventurous, one man can meet with only a few animals addicted to man-eating, but in this volume General Burton, who is not only a well-known big game hunter and observant naturalist, but a military historian, draws on the tales and records of others as well as his own experiences. His extensive knowledge of the literature of the subject, combined with his own powers of observation, has enabled him to produce a comprehensive record which will be of interest to the sportsman, the naturalist, and the general public. In these thrilling pages we meet with cannibals, lions, tigers, leopards, jaguars, pumas, hyenas, wolves and wolf-children, bears, crocodiles, great serpents, and sharks. *Illustrated, 12s. 6d.*

General

The New Science and the Story of Evolution

(Incorporating the author's "Story of Evolution")

JOSEPH McCABE

Author of "The Wonders of the Stars", "The Evolution of Mind", etc.

MANY years ago Mr. McCabe, whose works are familiar to most, published a volume, *The Story of Evolution*, which met with amazing success, since it explained simply and graphically the wonderful story of existence. The last twenty years have witnessed so much progress, have brought forward so many new theories, and have revealed so many new facts, that there is definite need to-day for a simple, comprehensive volume explaining what may be deduced from them.

Mr. McCabe has now satisfied that need, for he has rewritten his *Story of Evolution* in the light of modern knowledge, and has incorporated all this new knowledge into a general picture of life and man.

This fascinating story is set in the great frame of our mysterious universe. There are descriptions of the earth in its remote past and in its remote future. It is the book for all those who want an easy guide to modern science and its guidance of human affairs.

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THE prime object of this quite invaluable little book is to provide practical and straightforward advice for earning a definite income by trade and technical writing. The book tells how this may be achieved, how first acceptances may be obtained and then amplified into a continuous output, and how this output may be enlarged. All who aspire to the writing of commercial articles will find the advice contained in this book of the utmost help.

4s. 6d.

GENERAL.]

Contract Up-to-Date

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With an Introduction by FRANK ENGLAND

THIS invaluable book is for all those thousands of devotees to the greatest card game of all and is calculated will reduce their bridge handicap to scratch or plus figures. It covers the whole range of contract bidding under the most approved methods, and is designed to meet the requirements of all classes of players. A concise elucidation of the many features of the game has been the primary aim of Dr. Reford's work. An excellent and unusual feature is the illustrated summary of the principles laid down. This contains an illuminating review of an extremely interesting series of test hands played by the English and American teams in the International Duplicate Match in September of last year. Dr. Reford, who is a regular contributor to the *Bridge Magazine*, is joint editor with Mr. England of *The Play of the Cards*, which, published last year, was characterized by the *Observer* as the "concentrated essence of accumulated wisdom".

5s.

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MR. JACOBS has contributed to this fresh examination of a vital international problem the fruits of a lifelong study. His investigations of the subject show that certain assumptions underlying the policies advocated for the prevention of future war are demonstrably false, thus going far to explain the immense and otherwise unaccountable difficulty experienced in giving effect to the universal desire to co-operate for the firm establishment of security and peace.

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Author of "Stormbury", "Found Drowned", "The Farmer's Wife", etc.

MR. PHILLPOTTS is a writer of extraordinary versatility and brilliance. He has written plays which have convulsed packed theatres with uproarious mirth for months on end; he has written detective mystery stories which have confounded the most astute of armchair detectives; he has written stories of Devon and its people, full of fine writing and a sure understanding of human nature which have gained an immense following; and he has been acclaimed a stylist of real distinction. "To read Mr. Phillpotts is to open one's window and taste the country air at dawn", says the *Sunday Times*.

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Author of "Roamin' in the Gloamin'";

FEW people can tell a good story as well as an actor. And here is an actor, and one who has been topping the bill for fifty years, telling stories of all sorts. Many of the best are told against himself; others concern great folks he has met; but most of them are of that comfortable kind which you can adopt, adapt, and then tell as your own.

Sir Harry Lauder's famous laugh echoes on every page of this jolly book, and yet there's good, canny Scots sense; for who can speak with more authority on the secrets of "doing weel" than the man who rose from golf-caddie and coalminer to be the highest-paid laughter-maker in the world?

With illustrations by R. St. John Cooper, 5s.

General Fiction

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A New Novel

HERBERT ASQUITH

Author of "Roon" (5th impression), "Young Orland" (15th impression), etc.

SOME two years ago Mr. Asquith published the successor to his triumphantly successful novel, *Young Orland*, upon the publication of which the *Morning Post* wrote, "Mr. Asquith has surely arrived as one of the first English novelists—perhaps as the great novelist."

This announcement of a new novel will arouse the liveliest interest and speculation. Mr. Asquith has taken for his central figure a young and penniless girl who tramps the roads of England with her sailor father. It is a story of love and adventure, containing a wide and various gallery of characters in different planes of modern life. 7s. 6d.

Eve, the Enemy

TICKNER EDWARDES

Author of "The Honey-Star", "Sunset Bride" (3rd impression), etc.

MR. EDWARDES, who has lived for many years in the quiet villages of Sussex, is a shrewd yet kindly observer, and in *Eve, the Enemy*, he recounts, with deft touches of humour and pathos, the story of South-Down village life—its joys, disappointments and sorrows, its aspirations and loves. 7s. 6d.

A New Novel

CECIL ROBERTS

Author of "Scissors", "Sails of Sunset", "Half-Way", etc.

THE publication of Mr. Roberts' autobiography, *Half-Way*, was one of the events of the publishing season, and certainly one of the most astonishing volumes which has been issued for many years. This announcement of a new novel will be widely discussed, for Mr. Roberts is nothing if not provocative. The story, we are told, is very different to anything he has yet written, and is set, very largely, amongst the mountains of the Tyrol. There is little doubt that its publication will prove something of an event. 7s. 6d.

Good Time

GEOFFREY MOSS

Author of "Sweet Pepper", "Wet Afternoon", etc.

SINCE the publication of that triumphantly successful novel *Sweet Pepper* (now, by the way, issued for the first time at 2s.), the work of Geoffrey Moss has been followed by a vast company of readers with tremendous interest and anticipation. His last novel, *Little Green Apples*, was described by many as unquestionably the best book he has given us since *Sweet Pepper*. That honour, we feel, it will not hold for long. Indeed, it is not impossible that this new novel will supersede *Sweet Pepper* as his best work. It is unexpected, original, and very clever. 7s. 6d.

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FIRST REVIEW

"A book far above the average novel and, in its skilful handling of subsidiary, yet absorbing problems, a model of constructive effort."—QUEEN. 7s. 6d.

GENERAL FICTION]

The Silver Wedding

ETHEL M. DELL

Author of "Bars of Iron" (721st thous.), "The Hundredth Chance" (641st thous.), etc.

THIS is the story of a woman—Marcia Templeton—who, after marrying the knight of her girlhood's dreams and becoming the mother of his two children, finds herself very far from attaining her early ideals. The tremendous crisis of the war, whilst separating her temporarily from her husband and family, brings her into contact with another man with a spirit so akin to her own, that in a moment of fearful danger they cling together, awaiting death. But death does not come, and they are separated, but each after the ordeal bears the indelible memory of that strange communion. When they meet again, years later, they are immediately drawn by it, and the gigantic contest begins which leads at length to the triumph of the greater love. 7s. 6d.

Turnip Tops

ETHEL BOILEAU

Author of "The Arches of the Years" (4th thous.), "Hippy Buchan" (8th thous.), etc.

"ONE of the most exciting stories I have read since *Under Two Flags*", said Gilbert Frankau of Mrs. Boileau's fine novel, *The Arches of the Years*.

"A really worthwhile novel," was W. B. Maxwell's opinion; "finely conceived, firmly executed. Its author shows noble thought and high purpose."

It was, indeed, a novel of exceptional quality, and achieved immense popularity. This, her latest work, will be eagerly read by her countless admirers. 7s. 6d.

A New Novel

HELEN M. FAIRLEY

A new and exciting story by the author of "The Greater Freedom", "Kali's Jewels", "The Justice of the White Sahib", etc. 7s. 6d.

The Golden Years

PHILIP GIBBS

Author of "The Winding Lane", "The Middle of the Road"
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A NEW novel by Philip Gibbs is an event looked forward to and welcomed by many hundreds of thousands of people. For, as a reviewer wrote in the *Sunday Times*: "Sir Philip Gibbs is a writer of sympathy and experience, novelist and philosopher—one of the rare examples of successful journalist turned successful author. He is therefore a gleaner both of facts and emotions, and by training adapted for converting his intellectual harvest into a loaf of quality that may be digested of the multitude." 7s. 6d.

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"RITA"

(Mrs. Desmond Humphreys)

Author of "The Grandmothers", "Calvary" (43rd thous.), etc.

IN this, her latest novel, Mrs. Desmond Humphreys illustrates the era of a new class of poverty: that of the well-born and at one time wealthy aristocrats of England, who, within the last ten years, have found incomes lessening and estates a mere ruinous outlay, and the general effect of life one of endeavour. 7s. 6d.

FIRST REVIEWS

"Will have a wide appeal."—DAILY MAIL.
"One of her happiest novels."—BYSTANDER.

Winter Wheat

EDWARD WOODWARD

Author of "The House of Terror", etc.

AGAINST a background of the countryside, the hunting-field, and Aintree on Grand National day, Mr. Woodward has fashioned this human story. The love of two men for the same girl—none the less poignant through its frequency—brings here disaster and a mystery of unusual ingenuity. 7s. 6d.

GENERAL FICTION]

The New Crusade

ANTHONY GIBBS

Author of "Heyday" (5th thous.), "Young Apollo" (8th impression), etc.

HERE is Mr. Anthony Gibbs in merry mood. *The New Crusade* concerns a millionaire, Lord Surbiton, who plans to turn England naked. He buys a newspaper to plug the idea of nakedness; he parades the Dawk (a most entertaining gentleman) naked through Surrey carrying a banner proclaiming the New Crusade. By skilful work in the Press, by the most elaborate and far-reaching campaign, the idea begins to spread. After a number of quite fantastic adventures the Crusaders begin to get the idea across. There is a heat wave, and wild scenes on the Serpentine "Lido" and amongst Surrey "hikers". This story makes a most joyous piece of fun, and those who read into it a little deeper than others will find it a searching skit on modern conditions and the power of the Press. 7s. 6d.

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DOROTHEA CONYERS

Author of "The Strayings of Sandy" (84th thous.), etc.

THIS is another of those cheerful, gay stories of the Irish hunting-field for which Miss Conyers is so famous. In it one finds adventure, romance, and a touch of mystery. 7s. 6d.

FIRST REVIEWS

"As good as any she has written, with a vividness and humour in it, and the very smell and sight of the Irish countryside."—EVENING NEWS.

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GREEN SANCTUARY is a novel of absorbing interest—an alluring study of a lovable rake who stands midway between the influence of two women—an angel and a robot—and the tragi-comedy which results. As one reads to the surprising end of this fine story, one is conscious of a challenge and a question. Which of the two men who figure most prominently in it possesses in greater degree the spirit of saintliness? 7s. 6d.

Blow Bugles Blow

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THIS long, dramatic novel portrays character in intense action on a big canvas. The story opens on the hero's last night at Cambridge, "on the threshold". He meets a young German girl living in a London attic. Life had begun to weave a standard pattern when the Great War bursts into being and he crosses to France. His romance with the German girl feels the full impact of war. With increasing passion the story reaches a turning-point in No Man's Land, where religion is thrown dramatically in silhouette against the horror of battle. 7s. 6d.

FIRST REVIEW

"He shows how the devastation of war can call forth the utmost sublimity in man. . . . It gives the reader much to think about."
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The Pendulum Swings

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E. W. SAVI

Author of "A Man's a Man" (40th thousand), etc.

THIS is a powerful story of human relations and psychology written in Mrs. Savi's most vigorous style. It contains humour and pathos and poignant situations. A young girl, ignorant of her parentage and brought up in unusual circumstances, meets a man who has plunged himself in indiscretion and follies, only to realize his mistake when it is almost too late. The girl's influence upon him, and on those with whom she comes in contact, forms the nucleus of the plot. *The Pendulum Swings* is undoubtedly one of Mrs. Savi's best stories. 7s. 6d.

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FREDERIC ARNOLD KUMMER

Author of "Ladies in Hades", etc.

FORBIDDEN WINE is the glowing love story of Omar Khayyam and the exquisite Princess Turkan. About these two Mr. Kummer has woven in his vivid style a romance of intense feeling and power against the glamorous and sensuous background of Persian magnificence. 7s. 6d.

GENERAL FICTION]

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Author of "Tales Told to Simpson", "Arnold Waterlow", etc.

K EEN and clear cut, embodying an exquisite use of words and a profound insight into the waywardness of human nature, Miss Sinclair's stories invariably carry the mark of her clarity of thought and expression. A new book from her pen is an event, for such memorable novels as *Arnold Waterlow*, *The Allinghams*, etc., have placed her amongst the most distinguished of modern writers, and found for her an ever-increasing circle of admirers. In this collection of tales she is often at her most brilliant, and the volume is one which, without doubt, will enjoy wide success. 6s.

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REX BEACH

Author of "Son of the Gods", "Don Careless", etc.

S TAGED amidst the warmth and the exotic atmosphere of the Southern States, this latest of Rex Beach tales tells of the pecuniary downfall of a girl who, coming from old stock, possessed an indomitable courage which helped her towards her goal, and the attainment of those things which she set out to do, despite the difficulties with which she was forced to contend. Poignant moments, sincere and convincing love and affection, characters honest and dishonest, but all believable, are pleasantly interwoven in this vigorous and live story. 7s. 6d.

The Altar of Sacrifice

ISABEL C. CLARKE

Author of "As the Gentle Rain" (4th impression), "Italian Adventure" (11th thous.), etc.

L ESLEY MARVELL, a struggling and impecunious young artist, found herself suddenly the heiress to a large fortune. But in Italy, by the Greek Temples of Pæstum, there came to her the first call to sacrifice, and she is awakened to the fact that, owing to a clause in her grandfather's will, it would be impossible for her to retain her "great possessions". This is a powerful and challenging story, written with that sincerity, charm and sympathy that a succession of consistently fine novels have led us to expect from Miss Clarke. 7s. 6d.

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LAURENCE W. MEYNELL

Author of "Storm Against the Wall", "Bluefeather"
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THE title of this novel is taken from Humbert Wolfe's poem, *Requiem*, and comes from a passage which expresses the passionate longing for beauty, physical and spiritual, and the agonies of its realization which torment and yet delight the human heart. The story concerns five people, and is chiefly centred round the figure of a young wife who hardly understands the desires which, in a masculine world, hedge her about. Her reactions to that world and her subtle influence on the characters that surround her lead up to the culminating point of the story, where she is persuaded to make the greatest sacrifice any woman can be called upon to offer. 7s. 6d.

Those Others

SIMON DARE

Author of "Where No Wind Comes" (4th thous.), "If the Tree Fall", etc.

HERE are the love-stories of a little group of people by an author whose popularity is growing with each succeeding publication, and whose novels are selling in their thousands. *Those Others* is a charming story which shows that love, even though it may be the beautiful flower, has many thorns upon its symbolic stem which pierce and wound until the sap dies down and the blossoms fade. . . . Thus are life and love only plants in the garden of the world. They breathe a little, grow to beauty, and slip away into the limbo of forgotten yesterdays. 7s. 6d.

Folly's Coombe

JOSCELYN FOXCROFT

Author of "The Virgin Widow"

DISAPPOINTED in love, and fresh from the war, the hero of this tale, unconsoled by riches, removes into his chosen wilderness. Amidst the glories of South Devon, so vividly portrayed by Mr. Foxcroft, he loses grief and finds solace in work and altruism, visualizing existence anew. 7s. 6d.

FIRST REVIEWS

"He has a good narrative style . . . his book will please a wide circle of admirers."—SUNDAY EXPRESS.

"Very convincing . . . will certainly add to the reputation made for him by 'The Virgin Widow'."—MORNING POST.

GENERAL FICTION]

Saml. Pepys Looks at Life

R. M. FREEMAN

(Saml. Pepys, Junr.)

With a Foreword by Lord Riddell

Author of "Saml. Pepys, Listener" (4th impression), etc.

SAMUEL PEPYS, LISTENER, was a diverting book which achieved great popularity and was heartily welcomed by the critics. "If you like vigour in literature," wrote Harold Nicholson in the *Daily Express*, "read this book. Mr. Freeman has really got himself into the skin of Samuel Pepys, and his shrewd parody of Pepys' style and character makes amusing reading. Parodies are always dull unless they add something to the original; Mr. Freeman, with his diabolical insight into the Pepys type, certainly adds something to the original. It is a very clever and scholarly piece of work."

In this present volume, wherein Mr. Freeman continues in his delightful strain, the purely domestic experiences that bulked so largely in *Samuel Pepys, Listener*, are reinforced by others of a less esoteric kind, and give us more of Samuel in his outside relations with the world of London.

With Illustrations by Arthur Wragg, 7s. 6d.

Butterflies Have Wings

HILDEGARDE HUNTSMAN

Author of "The Laughing String"

FEW parents can realize that their children are growing up. Mamma and Papa England certainly could not, and to them Vanessa was always "Butterfly". Her parents could not understand why she was dissatisfied with her pleasure-filled life. But Vanessa wanted more than pleasure. She aspired high with her butterfly wings; and she came to grief. She wanted to find out, so she experimented and told white lies; but she was honest (until it hurt) with herself.

Some people may call her a minx, but no one can help loving her and sympathizing with her point of view.

This story of the affairs of a middle-class family, told as it is with charm and humour and a quiet mastery of style, will appeal to and interest a very wide variety of tastes.

7s. 6d.

Miss Perfection

The Story of an Airedale Terrier

DE VIC BEAMISH

BETTY was an Airedale terrier, the adored possession of a factory hand. But she was destined for higher things, became famous as a show-dog, and was known "on the bench" as "Miss Perfection". And so Betty was obliged to leave her master and entered into the kennels of a kindly young couple who sought to make a living from their pets. But she couldn't forget the kindness of her former master, and even when taken to the Continent (where she had no end of a time, and numerous doggy amours) she felt within her the longing for her old life.

Eventually, of course, as in all good tales, Betty realized her fondest wish, but not until she had almost broken her doggy heart.

Miss Perfection, with its numerous illustrations, is an altogether delightful publication, designed to amuse and hearten the most jaded reader of modern fiction. *Illustrated, 5s.*

Whisper

LADY MONTEITH ERSKINE

Author of "Sex at Choice" (9th impression), etc.

THE immense sales of Lady Monteith Erskine's works on popular physiology have proved the great value and help they have been to many thousands of people. Thus her first novel, *Whisper*, is assured a welcome reception and will be read with enjoyment and interest by its author's following. The story of Delvine St. Clair is one of intense pathos and will arouse the sympathy of all who are aware of certain hidden facts in the lives of individuals to be found in every grade of society. From among the many other characters vividly depicted who play their part in this story it is Aline, beauty-loving, tragically temperamental, who provides the thrill of compassion which stirs both heart and mind into the glad acceptance of a novel at once charming and illuminating. *7s. 6d.*

GENERAL FICTION]

The Fifth Commandment

HORACE ANNESLEY VACHELL

Author of "Into the Land of Nod", "Quinneys'", etc.

THE *FIFTH COMMANDMENT* is a commentary upon certain phases of modern domestic life. Mr. Vachell deals seriously but humorously with the conflicting claims of youth and age, and attempts to hold a balance between them.

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First

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